



## How to Cure Dyslexia

He had read one of my articles on dyslexia and wrote:

It was extremely interesting, logical and above all explained the whole problem. It gave me important clues as to my own disabilities with reading and writing. I do'nt [sic] remember which method of reading I was taught, but I am positive it was the look-say method; this would certainly explain my difficulties in reading and writing as a child; and to this day I still have problems with reading or should I say misreading and especially spelling.



He then went on to explain how he reads:

I can read well enough, but I have to concentrate. For some reason I miss words or don't [sic] see them. I have a fear of reading aloud in public even with family or a child. I miss-read or insert the odd word, but I manage to stay within the context of the passage. I have a little difficulty in pronouncing new words, I seem to make them fit what I think they should be or I look at a word to [sic] quickly and ad-lib, Eg. Alpha-Phonics at first was Alphonics.

Obviously, he is a sight reader rather than a phonetic reader. His fear of reading aloud is common among dyslexics. It can be extremely embarrassing if one can't read a word on the page. He then explained his writing problems, as follows:

Bad handwriting although it is getting better. I don't have patience for it. Punctuation and especially spelling are substandard, but with rereading, and the use of a dictionary I can eliminate most mistakes. Sometimes I totally forget how to spell a simple every-day word. I have difficulties with the 'i' and 'e' relationship and the rules regarding word end changes.

As he himself reveals, the way he was taught reading and writing at primary school did him no favor. Many teachers, too, have no idea that what they are doing will create a life-long handicap to an otherwise highly intelligent youngster. The letter-writer continues:

To read this letter it might seem as if I have quite a problem but I don't. I speak very well (posh some might say); with a little effort, concentration and the aid of a dictionary I can write quite constructive letters, although the hand-written variety have to be rewritten a few times. Thank God for the invention of the World Processor. But essentially reading and writing should not take so much thought, it should pass almost effortlessly from eyes to mouth and from mind to pen. I would be grateful for any assistance with this particular journey that I'm on and thank you for your help this far. Yours Sincerely.

### Motivation Is the Key to Success

It is unusual for a dyslexic to be able to see his own problem as clearly as this individual does. Many dyslexics are so crushed, so embarrassed by their disability, which, they fear, is the result of a defective



brain, that their sole way of dealing with the problem is to hide it.

The letter writer, on the other hand, realizes that his reading and writing problems are not due to a lack of innate ability or intelligence but are due to the teaching methods used in his primary education. He is highly articulate and a great conversationalist, but his primary school teacher gave him a poisonous gift: a reading handicap.

In my own experience as a tutor, especially in teaching disabled sight readers to become proficient phonetic readers, I have found personal motivation to be the key to success. Those who resist the teaching or have a hostile, angry attitude growing out of past failure and frustration are the most difficult to retrain. It is hard to blame them for this negative attitude since the damage that was done to them in primary school causes them continued pain and humiliation every day of their lives. And they expect the retraining program to be as painful and frustrating as the original back in primary school.

The letter writer, on the other hand, had confidence in his basic intelligence. He simply wanted to know how to cure his acquired disability. Obviously, he had the will to do what needed to be done. And so, I recommended the following: First, he had to become a phonetic reader. He had to retrain himself so that instead of looking at our written language as a series of still pictures to be interpreted by spoken language, he had to see the written word as a direct, accurate representation of the spoken language itself. He had to relearn the alphabet as a set of symbols that stand for the speech sounds of the language and not just a set of arbitrary, decorative curlicues invented to make spelling difficult. Each alphabet letter represents a speech sound, and that's what has to be learned in order to become a phonetic reader.

When properly taught in the primary school, the pupil is sufficiently drilled in the letter sounds so that an automatic association between letters and sounds is developed. This then permits the pupil to "sound out" the words he or she is reading. The reason why phonetic readers read with ease and enjoyment is because once they've developed this automatic association between letters and sounds, this phonetic reflex, the reading process becomes as effortless and accurate as speaking or listening.

The letter writer instinctively understood this when he wrote: "Reading and writing should not take so much thought, it should pass almost effortlessly from eyes to mouth and from mind to pen." But his look-say training had placed an association stumbling block in his path. He had been trained to use his right brain to perform the function of his left brain, which was why he had acquired this needless disability.

When I created my Alpha-Phonics reading program back in 1983, my aim was to help parents easily teach their children to read phonetically at home and help tutors retrain the reading disabled and dyslexic so that they could become good phonetic readers. I had carefully studied our English alphabetic system and came up with a way of making it as simple to teach as possible.

My personal tutoring experiences proved that my method worked very well. For example, I'll relate the story of one seriously disabled reader who was in college and struggling to get by. This student had never read a book for pleasure. Reading was a painful chore. But with Alpha-Phonics, I taught him the entire alphabetic system. And then I had him apply his new phonetic knowledge to his reading. I used back issues of the *Reader's Digest* as text.

He had to be made aware of all of his misreadings. If he left out a word, I had him reread the sentence until he became aware of his error. If he put in a word that wasn't there, he had to reread the sentence. This helped him become an accurate reader. When it came to new multisyllabic words, I had him write



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on January 30, 2012

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them down in a blank notebook, dividing them up into their syllables. At every session we started by reading that list of words, which kept growing larger and larger. In time he was able to replace his holistic reflex with a phonetic one. It took about a year, but after it was done, he had become a good phonetic reader and a lover of books.

So I knew that dyslexia could be cured long before the neuroscientists discovered the plasticity of the brain. It takes time and effort, but it can be done. But my own experience as a tutor taught me that look-say reading habits do not automatically disappear after a pupil has learned the alphabetic system. It requires conscious effort on the part of the pupil to overcome these bad habits. And that is why it is very important to make the pupil aware of his misreadings.

Most look-say readers are not aware of the errors they make because they were taught that accuracy is not important and they were encouraged to guess and “take risks.” If the word says “horse” and the pupil says “pony,” the teacher thinks that’s fine. After all, the child is getting the meaning. But, in my humble opinion, if a child sees the word horse and says pony, he or she can’t read.

Most of today’s teachers do not bother to correct sloppy reading, let alone sloppy spelling. They don’t even teach a child how to hold the pen correctly. But pupils know the difference between what is correct and what is not. And that is why so many of them don’t want to read aloud in class, for fear of appearing stupid. Accuracy may not matter to the teacher, but it does to the pupil who is terrified at the thought of making a fool of himself before his classmates.

As for spelling, we shall take it up in my next column.

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