Cluster of difficulties
Cluster of difficulties – glossary

**allergies**  No real proven link but some dyslexic people seem prone to allergies and conditions flaring up such as asthma and eczema – attributed to greater stress levels or possibly a weaker immune system.

**auditory delay**  Slow to process sound especially speech. This can make note-taking in lectures or following lengthy oral instructions difficult.

**automaticity**  Functioning/carrying out tasks, e.g. reading, spelling without conscious effort, (affects multi-tasking when skills are not automatic, e.g. poor reading skills generally affect comprehension).

**bizarre spelling**  Spelling that is unrelated to the normal sound letter correspondences or to the visual pattern.

**clumsiness**  Lacking manual dexterity or co-ordination.

**comprehension**  Extracting meaning from text, sound or visuals.

**distractibility**  Interested in everything around and unable to block out unwanted sights, sounds, movement or smells. Sometimes called ‘stimulus-bound’.

**disorganisation**  Difficulty in co-ordinating time, thoughts, paperwork – assignments etc.

**distorted perception**  Seeing and/or hearing the world differently to others. Inability to react to sight, sound, touch, taste, etc in the same way as others.

**handwriting**  Difficulty with fine motor control and sometimes the recall of letter shapes.

**impulsivity**  Acting on impulse rather than using all the given information in a considered manner.

**inconsistency**  Erratic abilities or performance, resulting in ‘good days and bad days’.

**L/R confusion**  Inability to remember left from right or difficulty following directions.

**late maturation**  Late at reaching the stage of physical and emotional development expected for their years or compared to peers.

**long-term memory**  Our permanent mental storage system.

**malapropisms**  The unintentional misuse of a word by confusion with one that sounds similar, e.g. ‘Muriel’ for ‘mural’ or ‘placebo’ for ‘gazebo’.

**messiness**  Lack of physical organisation.

**mixed laterality**  Not strongly ‘right sided or left sided’ as the majority of people are, e.g. write with their right hand, listen with their right ear as ‘lead’ ear and kick a ball with their right foot, etc.
perseveration  Staying on task for longer than one would expect, long after the original stimulus has gone – unable to come off task, as it were.

phobias  Extreme, irrational fear or dislike of something.

phonological awareness  Ability to hear and process (separate/manipulate) the individual speech sounds (phonemes) of own language.

retrieval  Difficulty accessing data, usually single words, from long-term memory: the ‘I know it but can’t think of it just now’ scenario.

rote learning  Learning through repetition rather than understanding.

scotopic sensitivity  Sensitivity to certain spectrum of white light, resulting in visual distortion which often affects the ease with which a person can read and sustain their reading, night driving etc. Those assessed with scotopic sensitivity generally show a marked and immediate improvement in reading by overlaying text with coloured plastic sheets. It is recommended that persistent problems are addressed by an optometrist as the condition may need corrective tinted glasses or other interventions.

self-esteem  How a person rates him-/herself against others.

sense of time  A ‘feel’ or estimation of how long something will take to carry out or achieve. A poor sense of time affects deadlines, journey times, getting to lectures on time, etc – a chaotic lifestyle can result.

sensitivity to noise  An unusual sensitivity to noise – extreme cases have even reported ‘hearing’ their own blood pumping around their body.

sequencing  Difficulty remembering the order of actions or events e.g. alphabet or days of the week.

short-term memory  The ability to hold information long enough to use it, for example, dialling a telephone number. Sometimes called working memory. Decisions are made all the time about whether to send information held briefly in short-term memory to long-term memory or to discard it.

social immaturity  Difficulty picking up on social ‘cues’/‘reading a situation’.

social ineptitude  Inability to pick up on other people’s ‘signals’ – oral and body language – and to decide the best course of action.

spoonerisms  Transposition of initial consonants in a pair of words, e.g. Par Cark.

stuttering  A speech impediment – which can become worse under stress.
Spectrum of specific learning difficulties

Autism/autistic spectrum

In psychiatry, autism is commonly considered to be a neurodevelopmental disorder (i.e. a disorder caused by the physical structure of the brain) that manifests itself through problems with communication, social relatedness, interest and behaviour.

The severity of the disorder can vary a great deal.

Common characteristics

- Difficulty in communicating with others. The development of verbal communication is often delayed (and in some cases never develops).
- Inability to understand that other people have beliefs, desires and intentions that differ from one's own. This can lead to an apparent lack of consideration for those outside their world.
- Taking things literally - inability to understand jokes, read between the lines, or understand unstated intentions or meanings.
- Difficulty controlling behaviour - a tendency to lose control, particularly when they are in a strange or overwhelming environment, or when angry and frustrated.
- Repetitive behaviour, sometimes taking the form of an intense preoccupation (what might be seen as obsession) in a particular subject (perseveration).

Asperger's Syndrome

Asperger's is a subgroup of the autistic spectrum. People with Asperger's Syndrome are characterised by eccentric behaviour and social isolation.

There is tendency to associate Asperger's with 'high functioning autism' as a result of the advanced abilities that are frequently associated with Asperger's Syndrome. Advanced abilities in language, reading, mathematics, spatial
skills, or music may be present. However, abilities can be counterbalanced by problems in other areas, in particular:

- social isolation;
- difficulty with eye contact;
- difficulty with empathy – interpreting or understanding other people’s behaviour, gaining information about other people’s emotional and cognitive states;
- difficulty understanding non-verbal communication, for example reading body language;
- clumsiness being prominent;
- grammatically correct speech often sounding strange due to abnormalities of inflection and a repetitive pattern;
- an intense and obsessive level of focus on things of interest, often coupled with an unusually high capacity to retain and recall large amounts of information about the subject (perseveration);
- a tendency towards sensory overload, such as being very sensitive to loud noises or strong smells and a dislike of being touched (phobias).

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

This is one of the most commonly diagnosed mental disorders. The exact causes are not known but it is widely held to be caused by an imbalance or deficiency in certain chemicals that regulate how the brain controls behaviour. It is particularly prevalent in children; however, it does continue into adulthood but may become less noticeable because of coping strategies that are developed.

In children behaviour is characterised by:

- inattentiveness to external direction;
- impulsive behaviour;
- restlessness. However, children with the ‘inattentive type’ are actually often sluggish and hypo-active.
In **adults** the characteristic behaviour includes:
- an inability to structure their lives and plan simple daily tasks;
- inattentiveness and restlessness.

In adults, studies have shown a high correlation between ADHD (more commonly known in adults as ADD – Attention Deficit Disorder, because for many the hyperactivity is more controlled or suppressed) and creativity. Many painters and performing artists seem to show significant evidence of ADHD, for example Robin Williams.

**Dyspraxia**

Dyspraxia is generally recognised to be an impairment or immaturity of the organisation of movement or a lack of development in a person’s ability to ‘get our bodies to do what we want and when we want them to do it’ (Ripley, Daines and Barrett).

Dyspraxia can manifest itself in these areas:

- speech and language;
- handwriting and drawing (dysgraphia);
- whole-body movements and coordination;
- physical play or activity.

**Dysgraphia**

Dysgraphia is a condition that makes writing difficult. Sufferers may be able to read and be extremely intelligent, but lack coordination, and may find other fine motor tasks like tying shoelaces difficult.

There are three main types of dysgraphia:

- **Dyslexic dysgraphia**
  Spontaneously written work is illegible, spelling is bad but copied work is
fairly good. Finger-tapping speed (a method for identifying fine motor problems) is normal.

- **Motor dysgraphia**
  Dysgraphia due to motor clumsiness produces illegible spontaneously written work, illegible copied work, normal spelling, and abnormal finger-tapping speed.

- **Spatial dysgraphia**
  Dysgraphia due to a defect in the understanding of space produces illegible spontaneously written work, illegible copied work, normal spelling, but normal finger-tapping speed.

**SOURCES**

- www.wikipedia.org
- www.aspergers.com
- www.psychnet-uk.com/dsm_iv/aspergers_syndrome.htm
- www.autismuk.com
- www.dyspraxiafoundation.org.uk
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Dyslexia</th>
<th>Dyspraxia</th>
<th>ADHD</th>
<th>Autistic Spectrum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensitivity to noise</td>
<td>Left-right confusion</td>
<td>Inconsistency</td>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>Distorted perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistency</td>
<td>Poor comprehension</td>
<td>Poor physiological awareness</td>
<td>Poor handwriting</td>
<td>Poor sense of time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impulsivity</td>
<td>Stuttering</td>
<td>Disorganization</td>
<td>Poor self-esteem</td>
<td>Poor comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distorted perception</td>
<td>Social inaptitude</td>
<td>Social immaturity</td>
<td>Bizarre spelling</td>
<td>Distorted perception</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>