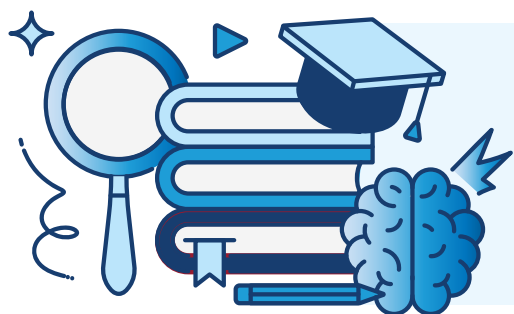




What is dyslexia?

Dyslexia is characterized by ongoing difficulties in word reading or spelling that persist despite instruction that is effective for other peer students.¹

What do classroom teachers need to know about dyslexia and why?

Although it is not the [role of classroom teachers](#) to diagnose dyslexia, they have a critical role in identifying reading difficulties, delivering evidence-based literacy support for all readers, and improving outcomes for struggling readers, including students with dyslexia and its associated characteristics. The [recently updated definition of dyslexia from the International Dyslexia Association](#) provides important information about its causes, core features, and warning signs. The graphic below highlights key implications of the updated definition for classroom instruction and support.

 What to know	 What it means	 Why it matters
Dyslexia has complex causes, with genetic, neurobiological, and environmental influences.	Both a student’s biology and environment can contribute to reading challenges.	Teachers cannot change a student’s biology, but they can influence literacy outcomes by delivering high-quality, evidence-based instruction.
Core difficulties: • Word reading, spelling, or both • May vary in severity and nature (accuracy, speed, or both)	Word reading and spelling difficulties are the core features of dyslexia.	By using explicit and systematic instruction, and adapting instruction to students’ needs, teachers can directly teach word-identification skills that many students with dyslexic characteristics find challenging.
Core warning sign: • Difficulties persist despite instruction effective for peers Other potential warning signs: • Early language weakness • Lagged reading comprehension, knowledge, and writing skills • Low academic achievement • Executive functioning and well-being concerns	Although other students progress with evidence-based instruction targeted to skill gaps, students with dyslexia may experience slow or no progress. Challenges with language may be an early indicator of dyslexia, and lagged reading and writing, low academic achievement, and concerns about memory, attention, self-regulation, and motivation can be later signs.	Classroom teachers play a critical role in monitoring students’ responses to instruction. When students show limited progress despite evidence-based instruction, additional assessment and increasingly intensive support may be needed to avoid longer-term negative outcomes.

In the early grades it can be difficult to distinguish between students with biologically based learning difficulties (such as problems in attention, memory, or phonological processing) and students with experiential gaps (such as inappropriate instruction or low home literacy). **The good news is that evidence-based practices grounded in the Science of Reading can support both groups.** By adjusting the intensity of the same core instructional strategies, teachers can support a variety of learning needs while helping all students develop essential literacy skills. Such approaches are also known as **Structured Literacy**.⁵



- For more tips, see What Works Clearinghouse practice guides on [Providing Reading Interventions for Students in Grades 4-9](#) and [Improving Reading Comprehension in Kindergarten Through 3rd Grade](#).

Scan for a link to the document references.

