



NORTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

# **Dyslexia Informational Paper**

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The purpose of this document is to provide parents, educators, administrators, and others with a resource that may assist in learning more about dyslexia. Additional resources that may increase understanding dyslexia are listed at the end of this document. North Dakota schools execute local choice in selecting assessments, diagnostic tools, and instructional programs. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) does not endorse specific assessments or programs.

# What is Dyslexia?

The NDDPI *Guidelines for Serving Students with Specific Learning Disabilities in the Education Setting* recognizes that dyslexia is associated with a specific learning disability in the area of basic reading skills. Students with dyslexia may have difficulty with reading and spelling and performing other skills related to the use of printed language (*National Center for Learning Disabilities*). Many students with dyslexia have trouble identifying distinct speech sounds within a word and learning how individual letters represent sounds and combine to make words. A student with dyslexia does not lack intelligence or the desire to learn. (Adapted from *IDA: Dyslexia Basics*)

The International Dyslexia Association (IDA), along with the National Institute of Child Health, define dyslexia as:

*"...a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge."*

-International Dyslexia Association Board of Directors, November 12, 2002.

## Analysis of the definition:

Dyslexia is...

- a specific learning disability

The identification of dyslexia meets the criterion for the condition of a specific learning disability in basic reading and/or reading fluency. However, the presence of a disability condition alone is not sufficient to determine if the student is a student with a disability under the IDEA. Eligibility under the IDEA consists of both identification of the condition and a corresponding need for specially designed instruction as a result of the disability. Not all children who have dyslexia need special education. Students who have a disability must meet specific requirements to be eligible for special education, and eligibility must be determined individually. In addition to having a disability, the disability must adversely affect the student's educational performance, and there must be a need for special education (34 CFR § 300.8).

- neurological in origin

The brain of a child with dyslexia is structurally and functionally different from the brain of a child who does not have dyslexia. These neurological differences may negatively impact abilities relating to phonological processing, rapid naming, word recognition, reading fluency, and reading comprehension (Shaywitz et al., 2006).

- characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition

A child with dyslexia has difficulty with consistency in accurate word identification. Reading rate and expression may be negatively impacted, which may affect the skill of reading fluency, and the ability to read quickly, accurately, and with good comprehension (National Reading Panel, 2000).

- a deficit in spelling and decoding abilities

A child with dyslexia does not intuitively learn to decode and spell words. Therefore, direct, explicit, and systematic instruction in applying phonics rules governing decoding and spelling is necessary for effective learning of printed language (Torgesen et al., 1999).

- a deficit in the phonological component of language

Children with dyslexia have a core deficit in these phonological processing skills (Torgesen et al., 1996):

- Phonological awareness - This is usually the most pronounced deficit and refers to the understanding and awareness that spoken words consist of individual sounds (i.e., phonemes) and combinations of speech sounds (i.e., syllables and onset-rime units such as -ight, right, tight, etc.). Two important phonological awareness activities are blending (i.e., combining phonemes to form words) and segmenting (i.e., breaking spoken words down into separate and discrete sounds or phonemes). Torgesen et al. (1997) relates that phonological awareness is more closely related to reading success than intelligence.
- Phonological memory - The ability to temporarily store bits of verbal information and retrieve it from short-term memory (Shaywitz, 2003).
- Rapid automatic naming (RAN) - The ability to retrieve the name of a letter accurately and quickly, number, object, word, picture, etc., from long-term memory. RAN is a skill predictive of efficacy in reading fluency, comprehension, and rate (Neuhaus et al., 2001).

- often unexpected with other cognitive abilities

A child with dyslexia exhibits reading difficulties despite demonstrated cognitive abilities in other areas. A key concept in dyslexia is an unexpected difficulty in reading in children who otherwise possess the intelligence, motivation, and reading instruction considered necessary for the development of accurate and fluent reading (Shaywitz, 2003).

- reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge

Lyon et al. (2003) highlights the impeded growth of vocabulary and background knowledge as a secondary consequence of dyslexia. Because a child with dyslexia does not read as much as his/her peers, word and background knowledge does not keep pace with the expectations for age and grade level. Without adequate reading experiences, vocabulary development, background knowledge, and reading comprehension are ultimately impaired.

The exact causes of dyslexia are not completely clear. However, brain-imaging studies show significant differences in the way the brain of a child with dyslexia develops and functions (Shaywitz, et. Al, 2001). The neurologic differences evident in a student with dyslexia are usually genetic. Because they are neurological in nature, a person with dyslexia will probably experience difficulties his/her entire life.

The IDA reports,

"about 13–14% of the school population nationwide has a handicapping condition that qualifies them for special education. Current studies indicate one half of all the students who qualify for special education are classified as having a learning disability (LD) (6–7%). About 85% of those students have a primary learning disability in reading and language processing. Nevertheless, many more people—perhaps as many as 15–20% of the population as a whole—have some symptoms of dyslexia, including slow or inaccurate reading, poor spelling, poor writing, or mixing up similar words. Not all of these will qualify for special education, but they are likely to struggle with many aspects of academic learning and are likely to benefit from systematic, explicit, instruction in reading, writing, and language."

According to *Dyslexia Help at the University of Michigan*, the prevalence rate of dyslexia is comparable between boys and girls. The difference exists in the frequency of testing, which is higher for males.

# Characteristics of Students with Dyslexia

Dyslexia and other reading disabilities seem to be strongly determined by genetic predispositions. Chances are if a student is exhibiting characteristics of dyslexia, he/she may have a family member who has some of the same difficulties.

Students identified with dyslexia typically experience primary difficulties in phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness and manipulation, single word reading, reading fluency, and spelling. Consequences may include difficulties in reading comprehension and/or written expression.

These difficulties in phonological awareness are unexpected for the student's age and educational level and are not primarily the result of language difference factors. The following are the primary reading/spelling characteristics of dyslexia:

- Difficulty reading words in isolation
- Difficulty accurately decoding unfamiliar words
- Difficulty with oral reading (slow, inaccurate, or labored without prosody)
- Difficulty spelling

It is important to note individuals demonstrate differences in degree of impairment and may not exhibit all the characteristics listed above. The reading/spelling characteristics are most often associated with the following:

- Segmenting, blending, and manipulating sounds in words (phonemic awareness)
- Learning the names of letters and their associated sounds
- Holding information about sounds and words in memory (phonological memory)
- Rapidly recalling the names of familiar objects, colors, or letters of the alphabet (rapid naming)

Consequences of dyslexia may include the following:

- Variable difficulty with aspects of reading comprehension
- Variable difficulty with aspects of written language
- Limited vocabulary growth due to reduced reading experiences

*\*Taken from The Dyslexia Handbook Procedures Concerning Dyslexia and Related Disorders, 2021.*

*Dyslexia in the Classroom: What Every Teacher Needs to Know* (2017) created by the IDA says students with dyslexia may possess common areas of strength, which may include, but are not limited to:

- Strong visual abilities
- Talents in the areas of mechanical skills, music, art, drama, sports, and creative writing
- Curious with great imaginations
- Ability to "figure things out"
- Seem more mature than their same age peers

Many students have one or even two of the following characteristics associated with dyslexia. Still, a student with dyslexia typically has many of the characteristics that present themselves over time and significantly impact learning in the academic environment.

Some of the more common characteristics of dyslexia include:

- Difficulty learning to speak
- Difficulty organizing written and spoken language
- Difficulty memorizing number facts
- Difficulty reading at a rate that enables comprehension
- Difficulty rapidly recalling the names of objects, colors, or letters
- Difficulty in keeping up with and understanding what was read when longer assignments are given
- Difficulty with handwriting
- Difficulty learning foreign languages
- Difficulty completing math operations correctly
- Difficulty in understanding the difference between "left" and "right"
- Difficulty making friends or learning social skills

# Indicators of Dyslexia at Different Ages

Students exhibit various indicators at different ages that may suggest a possible reading Specific Learning Disability (SLD) like dyslexia. (Information adapted from the University of Michigan's *Clues to Dyslexia* and the Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity's *Signs of Dyslexia*.)

## Preschool

- Delay in talking
- Speech may be difficult to understand and may sound like "baby talk"
- May not have a favorite book
- May not sit alone and look at books, may not turn the page one at a time, and may not know how to open and hold books
- Difficulty recalling the right word (word retrieval)
- Difficulty recognizing letters in own name
- Difficulty learning and remembering names of letters
- Difficulty learning common nursery rhymes (auditory memory)
- Difficulty understanding words are read from left to right
- Difficulty listening to someone else read for extended periods
- Difficulty with remembering and following directions

## Kindergarten and First Grade

- Relies on pictures when reading
- Reading errors show no connection to the word written on the page (may substitute "kitten for the written word "cat")
- May state he/she does not like to read and complains about how difficult reading is
- Avoids reading
- Difficulty associating letters with sounds
- Difficulty remembering basic sight words
- Difficulty sounding out simple words
- Difficulty separating words into parts (butterfly is butter and fly)

## Second and Third Grade

- May omit endings of words
- May have illegible handwriting
- Extra time needed when speaking to others
- Difficulty remembering spelling words and rules
- Difficulty remembering words; may submit words like "things" for the proper term
- Difficulty sounding out words
- Difficulty with pronouncing long, complicated words
- Difficulty telling a story in sequential order



### **Fourth through Eighth Grade**

- Pauses, hesitates, or may frequently use words like "um" when speaking
- Confuses words that sound alike when speaking (tornado for volcano)
- May need extra time to answer when asked a question
- May incorrectly read common sight words
- May have difficulties with comprehension due to difficulty with sounding out words
- May not be fluent when reading aloud and may avoid reading out loud
- May not like to read for enjoyment
- May perform better on oral tests
- When reading out loud, reading may be monotone with no attention paid to punctuation
- Difficulty remembering things like dates, names, telephone numbers
- Difficulty with spelling and learning new vocabulary
- Difficulty organizing ideas for writing
- Difficulty reading words with multi-syllables
- Difficulty understanding word structure (prefix, root, suffix)

### **High School**

- Reading rate may be slower than same age peers (may not keep up with reading demands of multiple courses)
- Difficulty with automatic word recognition, which in turn, impacts the acquisition of knowledge through reading
- Difficulty with spelling and writing
- Difficulty with vocabulary, both written and verbal
- Difficulty taking notes in class
- Difficulty remembering mathematical or scientific formulas
- Difficulty organizing projects and may struggle with the completion of assignments on time
- Difficulty learning a foreign language

## Referral and Evaluation Planning

Early identification of students with dyslexia along with corresponding early intervention programs for these students will have significant implications for their future academic success. The provision of interventions begins within the student's general education classroom. If the student is successful and making adequate progress after the interventions are provided, no additional changes may be needed. If the student is not successful, more intensive interventions may be suggested and/or implemented by the school team.

When individual student data collected shows a student is unable to make satisfactory progress despite individualized, evidence-based classroom interventions implemented with fidelity, the school team may propose conducting an evaluation to determine whether the student may have a learning disability. In addition to the school making a proposal for testing, parents of the student may request an evaluation at any time.

During the evaluation, additional data/information is collected and used to determine if the student has a learning disability and needs specially designed instruction. The data collected must support both the presence of a disability and the need for specially designed instruction for the student to be eligible for special education services.

Sometimes a student is evaluated outside of the school setting, which leads to a diagnosis of dyslexia. The school team should consider information from an outside evaluation(s) as part of the evaluation conducted through the assessment process within the school setting. If a student is diagnosed with dyslexia but the need for specially designed instruction is not there, the student will not qualify for special education services under the category of SLD.

- Additional information for Determining SLD and Eligibility for Special Education is available in the *Guidelines for Serving Students with Specific Learning Disabilities in Educational Settings* on the NDDPI website.

# Examples of Interventions and Accommodations

Early intervention for students with learning challenges, including dyslexia, can establish a foundation for learning and increase the probability of later academic success. For students who may be at risk of having a specific learning disability, like dyslexia, proactive and preventative practices can alter the course of their academic careers.

Students come to school with a wide variety of skills, abilities, interests, and experiences with literacy. The NRP (2000) conducted a rigorous and comprehensive review of reading instruction research. The work outlined five essential components of the content of reading instruction programs, which needs to include phonemic awareness, phonics and word recognition, reading fluency, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. Each of these components should be taught and integrated with one another throughout instruction. Specifically, for children with dyslexia, students should be provided explicit, systematic instruction in basic and advanced phonemic awareness with explicit phonics instruction for the highest effectiveness.

When providing evidence-based intervention, the instruction should be:

- Explicit – directly teaches each language and print concept clearly.
- Systematic – has a definite, logical sequence of concept introduction.
- Cumulative – continual review of skills as they build on one another.
- Sequential and incremental – step-by-step procedures for introducing, reviewing, and practicing concepts. Immediate, corrective feedback is necessary to develop automatic word recognition skills.
- Multisensory – engages the visual, auditory, and kinesthetic channels simultaneously or in rapid succession.
- Data-driven – decisions are made based on data collected and reviewed, along with the student's instructional response over time.

When most students are developing coordinated literacy skills of reading, writing, and spelling, a student with dyslexia may struggle with these areas of skill development. Effective accommodations are aligned with classroom instruction, classroom assessments, and district and/or state testing. However, some accommodations appropriate for the classroom use may not be considered appropriate in certain testing situations.

The NRP in its report, *Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*, identified a list of interventions under four major areas central to reading: Alphabetics, Fluency, Comprehension, and Teacher Education and Reading Instruction.

Interventions and/or accommodations under each area may include:

## **Alphabetics:**

- Phonemic Awareness – the ability to identify and manipulate phonemes (the smallest sound units that make up language) in spoken words. Phonemes are combined to form syllables and words.
- Phonics Instruction – contributes to learning to read by teaching readers to use the alphabet system, which is needed to decode words, to retain sight words in memory,

and to call on sight word memory to read words by analogy (accessing words that have been learned and using parts of the spelling to read new words with similar spelling). Word prediction becomes more accurate when readers can combine context clues with letter-sound cues when figuring out unfamiliar words in text.

**Fluency** – reading with speed, accuracy, and proper expression:

- Students benefit by reading passages aloud with guidance and feedback.
- May include: repeated reading, paired reading, shared reading, and assisted reading.

**Comprehension** – "essence of reading," not only to academic learning, but lifelong living:

- Vocabulary learning and instruction – direct instruction of vocabulary required for specific texts.
- Text comprehension – intentional thinking of the reader engaged in the text through which meaning is made.
- Teacher preparation – assists in facilitating in the development of reading comprehension.

**Teacher Education and Reading Instruction:**

- Evidence based core reading program – provides a scope and sequence of skills to be taught and strategies to effectively teach reading skills to maximize student learning.
- School-wide implementation with a common understanding and consistency in practice – providing explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.
- MTSS – framework to provide all students with the best opportunities to succeed, which focuses on high quality instruction and interventions matched to student need. Progress is monitored frequently to make decisions about changes in instruction or goals, and data is used to allocate resources to improve student learning and to support staff implementation of effective practices.

\*Additional information on evidence-based reading programs and MTSS is available in the *Guidelines for Serving Students with Specific Learning Disabilities in Educational Settings* on the NDDPI website.

Accommodations provide the student with dyslexia effective and equitable access to grade-level or course instruction in the general education classroom. Accommodations are not one size fits all; rather, the impact of dyslexia on each individual student determines the necessary accommodation and should be determined by the school team. The list of examples is not exhaustive but may include:

**Sample Accommodations Involving Materials:**

- Clarify or simplify written directions
- Minimize the amount of copying from the board
- Allow students to use a keyboard to take notes
- Note-taking assistance
- Present a small amount of work at a time
- Block out extraneous stimuli

- Highlight essential information
- Provide formula charts
- Provide additional practice activities
- Provide a glossary in content areas
- Utilize audio recording devices
- Utilize assistive technology (tablets, electronic readers/dictionaries/spellers, text-to-speech programs, audiobooks, etc.)

**Sample Accommodations Involving Interactive Instruction:**

- Repeat directions
- Maintain daily routines
- Provide a copy of lesson notes
- Use step-by-step instruction
- Check for understanding
- Clarify or simplify written directions
- Combine verbal and visual information
- Write key points on the whiteboard
- Pair oral presentations with visual information and participatory activities
- Review daily
- Utilize explicit teaching procedures (advanced organizers, guided practice, demonstrate the skill, offer corrective feedback, monitor practice, review, set up independent practice)
- Utilize mnemonic devices

**Sample Accommodations Involving Student Performance:**

- Change the student's response mode
- Priority seating
- Design worksheets from easiest to hardest (hierarchical)
- Allow extra time
- Provide an outline of the lesson
- Provide word banks
- Allow students to preview reading materials
- Provide a quiet environment for reading
- Only ask student to read aloud if he/she volunteers
- Provide alternative projects instead of written reports
- Provide letter formation strip
- Provide work samples
- Provide additional practice
- Utilize graphic organizers
- Reduced/shortened assignments (e.g., chunking assignments into manageable units, fewer items given on a classroom test or homework assignment without eliminating concepts)
- Utilize assignment books or calendars
- Utilize cues to denote important items
- Utilize peer mediated learning

# Misconceptions of Dyslexia

The University of Michigan, Dyslexia Help website lists common myths relating to dyslexia. Some of the misconceptions regarding dyslexia are listed below.

- **Dyslexia is rare.**

In the United States, National Institutes of Health research has shown dyslexia affects 20%, or one in every five people. Some people may have more mild forms, while others may experience it more severely. Dyslexia is one of the most common causes of reading difficulties in elementary school children. Only 1 in 10 dyslexics will qualify for an IEP and special education that will allow them to get the help in reading they need.

- **Dyslexia can be outgrown.**

Dyslexia is lifelong. Yearly monitoring of phonological skills from first through twelfth grade shows the disability persists into adulthood. Although many students with dyslexia learn to read accurately, they may continue to read slowly and not automatically.

- **Dyslexia is innate, incurable, and permanent.**

While dyslexia is a lifelong learning disability, early, intensive, and systematic intervention can help a student keep up, retain his/her grade level in school, and minimize the negative effects dyslexia can have, such as low self-esteem and poor self-concept as a learner.

- **Dyslexia cannot be diagnosed until third grade.**

Professionals can make a definitive diagnosis as soon as the child begins to struggle with learning to read, spell, and write. The sooner a diagnosis is made, the quicker the child can get help. A combination of a family history of dyslexia and symptoms of difficulties in spoken language can help identify a child with a specific disability that includes dyslexia.

- **People with dyslexia cannot read.**

Most children and adults with dyslexia can read, even if it is at a basic level. Spelling is one of the classic red flags alerting parents and teachers of a serious underlying problem. The student may be unable to understand the basic code of the English language and cannot break down or reconstruct (with spelling) words using codes (letters).

- **Children with dyslexia will never read well, so it's best to teach them to compensate.**

Individuals with dyslexia can become terrific readers with the appropriate intervention. It is important to test a student early in order to identify any problems and attempt to prevent major reading difficulties before they even start.

- **Only children with an IEP or 504 plan can receive classroom accommodations.**

General education teachers can provide classroom accommodations to any student, regardless of whether that student has an IEP or a 504 plan.

- **If a child with dyslexia reads aloud for 20 minutes per day, it will improve his/her reading.**

Reading aloud will not help a child sound out unknown words. Instead, instruction that centers on understanding sounds of individual letters and how they blend to create words will assist the student in improving his/her reading abilities. When the student is expected to read unknown words, he/she may try to memorize the shape of a word and use pictures and context clues to guess the word, which may lead to frustration.

- **Students with dyslexia see things backwards.**

Students with dyslexia do not see things backwards because dyslexia is not a problem with the eyes. While new research has demonstrated that letter reversals of kindergarten children predicted spelling at 2nd grade, typical learners may reverse letters when initially learning.

- **Children with dyslexia are just lazy; they should try harder.**

With the technology of functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), research has shown students with dyslexia use a different part of their brain when reading and working with language. Students with dyslexia show a different pattern of brain function when reading; underactivity in some regions, over activity in others which, according to research, accounts for the difficulty students have in extracting meaning from the printed word. If students with dyslexia do not receive the right type of intervention and/or classroom accommodations, they often struggle in school, despite being bright, motivated, and spending hours on homework assignments.

- **Gifted children cannot have dyslexia or a learning disability.**

Many people with dyslexia are also considered gifted or talented and have accomplished outstanding things in their lives. Many famous authors, researchers, actors and actresses, politicians, athletes, and others from different professions have dyslexia.

- **Retaining a child will improve his/her academic struggles.**

According to several institutions (US Department of Education, American Federation of Teachers, National Association of School Psychologists), there is no benefit to retention because it may not improve a student's academic struggles. These students do not need another year of the same instruction - they need differentiated intervention that is research-based, systematic, and explicit.

- **If a child is not eligible for special education services, that child doesn't have dyslexia.**

Dyslexia comes in many degrees from mild to severe. Most children with dyslexia will not receive special education services unless they score very poorly (10 percentile or below) when comparing their level of performance to their peers or to the expected level of performance on grade-level standards.

- **Accommodations are a crutch, and the child for whom they are made will become lazy.**

Accommodations are not an advantage; it is an attempt to level the playing field whether it is a standardized test and/or homework assignment. Even with certain accommodations such as extra time on a test, a slow reader will still feel the same time constraints compared to the ordinary reader.

- **Dyslexia is a condition that only medical professionals can diagnose.**

Even though a physician may diagnose dyslexia, it becomes an educational issue when it significantly affects the student's performance in the school setting. Even when someone outside the school system diagnoses dyslexia, the school district is required to conduct a comprehensive evaluation to determine if the child is eligible for special education and related services.

A comprehensive evaluation may include the information obtained from sources outside the school setting as part of the process. However, most assessments and tests are administered by educators who are trained in and knowledgeable of the instruments and procedures to successfully identify SLD in the area of reading, which may include dyslexia. To be eligible for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), assessment results must demonstrate the disability has a significant impact on the child's learning and the student is in need of specially designed instruction.



# ND Law and Dyslexia

## Public Elementary Schools Reading Screenings (2019)

According to ND Century Code (NDCC) §15.1-32-25, each public elementary school shall include in the developing and processing of assessments and screening of reading, the core components of phonetic awareness, decoding, and spelling. The screening also must be offered if requested by a parent, legal guardian, or teacher.

## Pilot Program (2019)

The ND legislature provided funding to support a dyslexia pilot program (NDCC §15.1.32.26) to provide insight, guidance, and assist in making future determinations regarding dyslexia in North Dakota. The NDDPI chose pilot sites from a pool of applicants.

Chosen grantees are responsible for carrying out the following activities:

- Provide low phonemic awareness and other dyslexia risk factor screenings for children under seven years of age staffed by specialists trained in dyslexia and multisensory structured language programs.
- Provide reading intervention services to students identified at risk for being identified with dyslexia.
- Administer assessments to determine the program's effectiveness in improving the reading and learning skills of children enrolled in the program.
- Provide professional development on dyslexia identification and interventions to educators in schools participating in the grant.

## Credential for Specialist Trained in Dyslexia (2021)

NDCC §15.1-02-16 authorizes the NDDPI to issue the Credential for Specialist Trained in Dyslexia.

An individual who would like to add the Credential to their ND Professional License must complete certain coursework. The required coursework includes Introduction to dyslexia, Assessment for students with dyslexia, Interventions for students with dyslexia, and a minimum of three semester hours of practicum experience related to dyslexia assessment and interventions

An individual may be exempt from completing previously mentioned coursework if they have achieved certification approved by the IDA or the Center for Effective Reading Instruction (CERI) that incorporates requirements similar to the coursework. The certification must include a practicum experience with dyslexia assessment and interventions and is a minimum of three credits or forty-five clock hours.

An individual interested in applying for the Credential for Specialist Trained in Dyslexia may go to the NDDPI webpage or call the Office of Academic Support of the Office of Special Education for an application.

- Information is taken from ND Administrative Code 67-11-25.

## References

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