

Some Useful Technology Supports for Dyslexia

by Julie Brewer

Accommodations, programs and supports:

Make sure your child's IEP includes all the accommodations you want on it. You have the ability to include your own goals and supports. You are your child's advocate and if you don't speak up, things will be left unsaid. Do your research and ask other dyslexics what extra supports they use. Every dyslexic is different and has individual needs. It's all about figuring out the best options for your child.

No matter what school district your child is in, there should be a contact person with a title of/similar to: "Assistive and educational technology inclusion coach". I only discovered this person a year and a half after my son's designation. No one told me about this resource, I had to discover it on my own through multiple calls to the school board office looking for help. Once I found this person, she was so incredibly helpful in setting up and using the in-class tech accommodations for my son and myself as we navigated through all the new technology noise. With her help we discovered and tried many useful tools. I have listed our favourites below:

Chromebook and Google classroom, instead of paper and pen whenever possible.

- This includes Google Docs, Sheets, Sites, Slides, Drive, Photos. All of these programs automatically save the created documents to your Google Drive, which means one less thing to remember to do.
- Everything is accessible on any device with internet, which means if you forget your computer, you can still get your work done with someone else's device, or even with your cellphone. Having everything in one place is important for someone with dyslexia.

Read and Write extension for Goggle Chrome:

- Includes a more intuitive Speech to Text (STT) called **Talk and Type** feature than the built in accessibility STT feature on the Chromebook.
- **Hover Speech**, or Text to Speech (TTS) feature has the option to change the voices to find one that you can understand better. You can also change the speed in which the voice reads. If you don't highlight the exact words you want it to read, it will read the whole page... url and ads and all. But if you highlight a starting sentence it will continue reading while highlighting the sentence as it goes, giving you a visual of where the words are on the page. You have the option to pause the reading at any time.
- Includes a **Picture Dictionary**, and a **Written Dictionary**. The picture dictionary has been useful for Koen to create a quick visual of words he doesn't recognize. There's also an option to add words and meanings to an ongoing vocabulary list.
- **Mask Screen** feature allows you to see only a strip of the page, blacking out the rest. This minimizes distractions by blocking out most of the necessary images and words around what you're reading.
- **Simplify Page** quickly feature removes all the distractions on the entire webpage.
- **Highlighter** feature is helpful when you need to take notes or summarize what you're reading. You highlight the words you want to remember as you go, and at the end select **Collect Highlights**. The feature puts all your highlights into a single document.
- Discover feature is still in Beta testing, but it's available to try by clicking on the **Simplify** feature. It simplifies the web page, you can choose the font (Open Dyslexic is available), line spacing and text/background colours. It also highlights words that you might need to look up, hyperlinking the definition when you click on the word. TTS will read the definition for you with Hover speech.
- Some webpages aren't compatible with Read and Write. In this case you have to use the built in accessibility features on your computer. Most school districts have access to the subscription for Read and Write. Otherwise you can do a 30 day free trial to see if you like it.

Grammarly alerts the writer that something doesn't make sense in a sentence. You simply click on the underlined word and it tells you what you should do to fix it. The suggestions don't always make sense though, so the writer needs to double check. It's a wonderful first proofread option. Most school districts supply the subscription access to this.

Kindle E-Reader for when reading print is required (without audio). We change the font to the Open Dyslexia typeface and increase the text size.

School District assigned **Digital Textbooks** and novels are available on the **ARC-BC** program. The teachers have access and have to download and share the PDF books through Google drive. Teachers can also use school photocopiers to scan worksheets into digital format for students who need it. This makes the biggest difference for word problems and social studies comprehension.

Mindmup 2.0 extension is to create mind maps of your thoughts. If you need to write a story, essay, paragraph etc, you can use the mind map to first get your ideas out in random order as they come to you. Often teachers will accept this map as a first draft. Then you can use it as prompts to create a paragraph in a Google doc using STT. We have found that drawing little sketches of ideas first makes the mind map even easier to create.

Dictation/Scribes are helpful any time there isn't the option to use a computer. If someone can read questions and context aloud as well as record answers, it speeds things up with processing time.

Audio stories help build vocabulary and foster a love of learning. There are so many options available for audio stories, for both fiction and non-fiction. Audible, Cloud Library, and RB Digital content is mostly recorded with real voices, where some other programs use more computer voice recordings.

Control Alt Achieve

I found this **website** very helpful for finding new extensions and apps to try.

Other supportive Dyslexia Programs:

Davis Dyslexia Correction program teaches focusing skills, using visualization techniques. Clay is used to spell out words and create hands-on visuals for the definitions. This program is a prerequisite for learning to read. How can you read if you don't know how to focus? Once focus has been established, learning becomes more controlled. <https://www.dyslexia.com/>

Bulletmap Academy program teaches visual mind mapping. This technique can be used for brainstorming ideas, essay/story writing, note taking, and comprehension of written paragraphs. The program isn't cheap, but you can sign up for the program on a monthly payment and complete one month or more. They run it like karate, where you receive coloured belts as you complete levels. They give the option to start at a relevant level if you don't want to work your way through it all from the beginning up. The one on one coaching is very helpful for accountability and motivation. <https://bulletmapacademy.com/>

Vision Therapy: Many children with dyslexia also have an underlying vision challenge. Even if an Optometrist concludes a child has perfect SIGHT, a more in depth test from a Vision Therapist can rule out VISION problems. For example, Binocular Tracking when reading (how the eyes work together while reading multiple words). <https://www.neurovisualperformance.ca/>