

Breakdown of the Definition of Dyslexia

The definition for dyslexia in Indiana law is as follows: “ ‘Dyslexia’ means a specific learning disability that: is neurological in origin and characterized by difficulties with accurate fluent word recognition; and poor spelling and decoding abilities; typically results 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; may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge; and may require the provision of special education services after an eligibility determination is made in accordance with 511 IAC 7-40.”

Part One: Dyslexia is distinguished from other learning disabilities due to weaknesses occurring at the phonological level. A student who has a weakness at the phonological level has difficulty manipulating units of oral language such as words, syllables, or individual sounds. One of the more complex skills at the phonological level is being able to blend and segment individual sounds. This is called phonemic awareness. An example of a phonemic awareness task is giving a student three sounds to blend together such as c-a-t, the student produces the word cat. A student with dyslexia may struggle with this task and produce the word *cap* instead of *cat*. Students with dyslexia who have a significant weakness at the phonological level will have difficulty acquiring basic foundational reading skills.

Part Two: Dyslexia is a Specific Learning Disability. This means the student struggles with basic early reading and language problems. Dyslexia is neurobiological in nature and not due to educational or environmental factors. Family history is one of the strongest risk factors for struggling readers and developing the characteristics of dyslexia. Today, we have scientific evidence supporting our understanding that dyslexia is caused by a difference in how the brain processes phonological information.

Part Three: Dyslexia is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. In the classroom, students with dyslexia may struggle with decoding or sounding out words, reading words accurately and fluently, and developing basic spelling skills. These basic literacy skills typically develop in kindergarten through second grade but may remain a challenge for a student with dyslexia as they progress through school.

Part Four: These struggles 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. Typically, the reading difficulties a student with the characteristics of dyslexia experiences are not expected in relation to the

strengths the student demonstrates in other academic areas. For example, a student with dyslexia struggles with basic reading skills but may demonstrate average or above-average academic ability in other subjects. Additionally, the difficulties a student with dyslexia experiences are not expected given the student has been provided the same effective classroom instruction as peers who are making adequate grade-level progress.

Part Five: Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and background knowledge. For the student with the characteristics of dyslexia, the inability to decode fluently and accurately may impair the ability to comprehend text. Because of this challenge, the student with characteristics of dyslexia who has not received appropriate intervention may read less, and therefore have less opportunity to develop vocabulary, background knowledge, and less practice at reading to comprehend.