

## REVIEW

**Amanda T. Abbott-Jones:**  
***Cognitive and Emotional Study Strategies for  
Students with Dyslexia in Higher Education***

(Cambridge and New York: Cambridge  
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## 1. Introduction

Dyslexia, a complex neurological disorder affecting approximately 4 % of the global population (Singleton, 1999), presents significant challenges for students in higher education. In the UK alone, an estimated 134,320 students with a specific learning difficulty (SpLD) entered higher education in 2021/22, with dyslexia being the most prevalent SpLD (HESA, 2024). Although more dyslexic students are able to access higher education due to improved guidance and remediation (Tops and others, 2023), these students typically experience higher levels of anxiety than neurotypical peers in both academic and social contexts (Carroll and Iles, 2006).

The book *Cognitive and Emotional Study Strategies for Students with Dyslexia in Higher Education* addresses the urgent need for effective study aids tailored to dyslexic students in higher education and provides step-by-step guidance to help them overcome cognitive and emotional challenges. It distinguishes itself from previous works by uniquely presenting strategies from the perspective of dyslexic students instead of solely from an educational standpoint. Drawing on a wealth of experience and first-hand evidence from a broad spectrum of dyslexic students, the book offers readers extensive practical and valuable advice on overcoming difficulties through the development and implementation of effective learning strategies.

## 2. Overview of the book

The book comprises 10 chapters apart from the introductory chapter, each dedicated to a specific type of difficulty encountered by students with dyslexia in higher education and offering a wealth of coping strategies. The introductory chapter presents a range of definitions of dyslexia from multiple perspectives, highlighting the heterogeneous nature of the condition. It also outlines an array of physiological deficits commonly found in dyslexic students, such as phonological deficits, short-term and working memory deficits, and weaknesses in temporal processing. These deficits can significantly impede dyslexic students in various academic tasks, including organizational skills, note-taking, reading, spelling, essay writing, exams, presentations, and seminar discussions. By incorporating real-life experiences and quotes, the introductory chapter sets the stage for the rest of the book, which aims to provide practical study strategies to help students with dyslexia achieve success in their academic pursuits.

Chapter 2 delves into the essential topic of “Organization Techniques and Meeting Deadlines”, emphasizing the significance of effective organization strategies and the skill of breaking down larger projects into manageable, time-framed steps. Presented from the perspectives of dyslexic learners, this chapter provides valuable advice on developing effective organization strategies, which encompass the use of plans, multisensory methods,

and visual aids. The author considers it crucial to make organization enjoyable and tailored to individual needs, as this approach can help students maintain motivation and prevent procrastination. Furthermore, the chapter underscores using technology as a valuable tool, exploring how assistive software (e.g., online calendars) can be used in conjunction with traditional methods to improve organization and time management.

The author focuses on the challenges of taking notes during lectures in chapter 3, such as processing, retention, and retrieval issues under time-constrained conditions. A range of note-taking strategies are presented, including the Q Notes, Two-Column, Four-Quarter, and Mind Map methods, to facilitate more focused and organized note-taking for students with dyslexia. Chapter 3 also explores the use of shorthand, symbols, drawings, practical materials, and multisensory techniques to enhance the efficiency and engagement of the note-taking process. In addition, the utility of technology, such as recording devices and assistive software (e.g., Sonocent Audio Notetaker), is also elaborated, underscoring the importance of using these tools in conjunction with active learning methods. Finally, the author provides insight into the concept of metacognition and its crucial role in developing an awareness of how one can effectively process and retain information during note-taking.

In chapter 4, the author addresses the challenges associated with reading, namely slower reading speeds, re-reading, and the fear of being judged when reading aloud. Effective reading techniques are introduced, encompassing the PASS (Preview, Ask, Summarize, Synthesize) and SQ3R (Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review) strategies, skimming and scanning, and selective reading, which aim to help students grasp main ideas, locate specific information, and minimize unnecessary reading. In addition to introducing reading techniques, chapter 4 focuses on developing critical and analytical thinking skills by offering activities that guide readers in assessing the relevance and appropriateness of materials, interrogating evidence and arguments, and uncovering underlying biases and assumptions. Furthermore, the chapter revisits the role of metacognition in choosing the right environment, timing, and breaks for effective reading. Moreover, this chapter introduces technologies such as online thesauruses, Wikipedia, and text-to-speech software as resources to alleviate reading difficulties.

The challenges in retaining and retrieving information due to short-term and working memory deficits are explored in chapter 5, titled “Making Learning Memorable”. These challenges can lead to frustration, alienation and negative attitudes towards testing situations, affecting self-esteem and academic motivation. To tackle these challenges, the chapter introduces various mnemonic strategies, such as using memory palaces, highlighting keywords, employing multisensory methods, and incorporating mnemonics, repetition, and chunking. Additionally, the author provides valuable activities demonstrating the effectiveness of “chunking” and “categorizing” information for improving memory and outlines the four stages of memory in academic activities, offering useful strategies for each stage. Lastly,

the chapter explores how assistive technologies such as digital devices, speech-to-text software, and online resources can support memorization processes.

Chapter 6, titled “Essay-Writing Strategies”, acknowledges that students with dyslexia often struggle with essay writing, particularly in areas such as structuring writing, sequencing ideas, and expressing thoughts clearly. Various cognitive strategies are presented to overcome these challenges, underlining the value of proper planning, utilizing university resources, creating mind maps, and employing multisensory techniques. This chapter also covers effective writing techniques, including setting achievable word count goals, using subheadings for structure, applying the PEC (Point, Example/Evidence, Comment/Criticism) method to craft paragraphs, and designating proofreaders. Furthermore, the chapter explores strategies for demonstrating criticality in writing, distinguishes between descriptive and critical writing styles, and provides tools and questions to critically appraise published research.

In chapter 7, the author addresses spelling challenges, including issues related to phonological processing, memory, and visual processing speed, which can lead to negative emotions like shame and embarrassment for students with dyslexia. To help students improve their spelling skills, the chapter presents a variety of strategies, such as using mnemonics, sounding out words, employing repetition techniques like the Cover, Copy, Compare (CCC) method and the Look, Say, Cover, Write, Check approach, and copying words from academic papers to familiarize themselves with their visual representation. Furthermore, the chapter reiterates the importance of multisensory methods (e.g., the Orton-Gillingham approach) and metacognitive awareness in spelling. Lastly, the chapter explores how technology can be employed to tackle spelling challenges, such as spellcheckers in word processing software and online dictionaries.

To help college students with dyslexia overcome anxiety triggered by revision and exams, the author presents a plethora of effective revision strategies in chapter 8. These strategies include creating personalized revision materials, utilizing mind maps and visual aids, employing memory techniques, and staying motivated through goal-setting and planning. Recognizing that exams can induce heightened emotional strain, the author outlines several methods for effectively tackling them, including time management strategies, techniques for various exam types, and tips for alleviating exam-related anxiety. The chapter incorporates research findings and personal experiences of students with dyslexia throughout to demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed strategies.

Chapter 9 explores the challenges faced by dyslexic students when delivering presentations, such as fear, anxiety, and the feeling of being judged. A holistic set of strategies is proposed to help students alleviate nervousness and ensure a successful presentation, covering creating a detailed plan, conducting thorough research, developing a clear presentation script, and using visual aids effectively. Additionally, the chapter highlights the positive effects of

preparation, rehearsal, and timing on presentations and suggests incorporating audience participation activities to engage listeners and alleviate pressure on the presenter. Finally, the author provides guidance on how to handle audience questions professionally and productively, empowering students to develop confidence and earn the respect of their listeners.

Chapter 10 delves into the difficulties dyslexic students experience when engaging in public speaking, interviews, seminar discussions and debates, in terms of speech articulation problems, word-finding difficulties, and anxiety stemming from past negative experiences. To help overcome these obstacles, the chapter presents effective strategies that involve thorough preparation, active listening, asking questions, and using multisensory methods. Furthermore, the author offers tailored advice for specific forms of public speaking and addresses challenges encountered in different types of job interviews. Particularly, practical guidance is provided on building confidence, structuring responses with the STAR (Situation, Task, Action, Results) method, and conducting thorough research and preparation in advance.

The final chapter investigates the emotional challenges dyslexic students face and presents a comprehensive array of coping strategies to promote their overall well-being. This chapter emphasizes that emotional difficulties stemming from childhood experiences can manifest as internalized anxiety in adulthood, having a negative impact on academic performance and mental health in higher education. Additionally, various cognitive techniques are also outlined in this chapter, such as cognitive restructuring and seeking support, to alleviate anxiety and stress. A significant portion of the chapter is dedicated to the importance of implementing breaks, engaging in exercise, seeking comfort, and developing mental resilience through skill acquisition, goal setting, and controlled exposure. Most notably, the chapter offers a compassionate and empowering approach aimed at helping students with dyslexia cultivate resilience and success in the face of adversity.

### **3. Critical assessment**

The book makes significant and valuable contributions to supporting dyslexic students in higher education from diverse perspectives. First, it provides step-by-step guidance for each strategy tailored to the specific needs of students with dyslexia to help them overcome challenges in both cognitive and emotional domains. Second, the book not only introduces the advantages of each strategy but also emphasizes its disadvantages in specific scenarios and provides alternative approaches. For instance, when introducing the Four-Quarter Method, the author notes that a potential drawback is its tendency to confuse students when identifying and capturing the important parts of the lecture, leaving them uncertain about what information to write down. However, the author provides a remedy: when combined with the Outlining method, the issue can be mitigated to a certain degree. Third, the book features interviews with a large number of dyslexic students from various disciplines and academic levels, ranging from undergraduates to masters and PhD students. This feature

enhances the authenticity and relatability of the content, engaging readers and validating their own experiences. Fourth, the book's emphasis on self-awareness, metacognition, and personalization encourages students to take control of their learning process and develop strategies that suit their individual needs and preferences. Fifth, the inclusion of practical tools, such as templates and questionnaires, enhances the book's usefulness and applicability, providing readers with actionable resources to implement the strategies presented.

While this book provides well-established strategies to support the learning of students with dyslexia in higher education, there remain several areas that could be improved. The first and most apparent limitation is that the sheer number of strategies and techniques presented in each chapter may overwhelm some readers, particularly those grappling with the negative emotions stemming from dyslexia. For instance, in chapter 4, the author introduces 13 reading techniques and, in chapter 5, 15 spelling techniques are presented. The overabundance of information also leads to another limitation: the book presents strategies without prioritizing them, which could potentially cause difficulties for dyslexic readers when attempting to select and implement these strategies. Consequently, the book could adopt a more streamlined approach, focusing on the most effective strategies and offering clearer guidance on how to prioritize and implement them. Furthermore, the book could benefit from a more thorough examination of how individual differences among students with dyslexia may impact the effectiveness of the proposed strategies. By doing so, readers with dyslexia could select strategies that are more appropriate for their own circumstances, requiring fewer attempts based on their personal characteristics.

Overall, *Cognitive and Emotional Study Strategies for Students with Dyslexia in Higher Education* is an exceptionally valuable resource for its intended audience, which includes students with dyslexia, educators, support staff, and family members. By providing a comprehensive, evidence-based, and practical guide to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by learners with dyslexia in higher education, the book furnishes readers with the tools and knowledge necessary to foster academic success and emotional well-being. While acknowledging areas for potential enhancement, the book's strengths significantly outweigh its limitations, rendering it an indispensable resource for anyone engaged in supporting or working with students with dyslexia in higher education.

#### 4. References

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