



Website context: Thinking about Dyslexia → Teaching

The effects of dyslexia on presentations and seminars

Some dyslexic students are very strong orally, but dyslexia can also affect spoken language.

What to look out for

- Word retrieval: students know the meaning they want but there are delays or blocks in attaching the sounds.
- Organising words into a coherent sentence: you may notice students starting a sentence and then realising it is not going to work and starting again.
- Pronunciation of unfamiliar words: students may need to hear a new word many times before they remember the pronunciation.
- Mispronunciation of known words (exasperate for exacerbate, pacific for specific): either a word that sounds similar is retrieved, or there is a slight breakdown in the sequenced planning of the motor processes of spoken output and the word 'comes out wrong'.

Students therefore may sound hesitant or disjointed in their speech. They may also be self-conscious, particularly where pronunciation is concerned. In informal discussion, they may appear quiet. This might be because they need time to formulate their thoughts into a suitable output and by the time they have done it, the discussion has moved on. It might be fear of appearing 'stupid' by mispronouncing words. In formal presentations, they often spend extra time rehearsing and feel particularly under pressure.

Tutors can help by:

- Being sensitive to reasons for apparent lack of contribution.
- Discussing issues with individual students in a 1:1 setting.
- Offering more time for formal presentations, not with the expectation that students should speak for longer, but to reduce pressure and anxiety.
- Being clear in assessment how dyslexia related hesitancy should be dealt with.

Other issues

Working in groups: dyslexic students usually want to start as soon as the presentation topic is given because they know things take them longer and if the rest of the group do not need to work like this it can present problems. Depending on the student, it can mean that the dyslexic student becomes very pro-active in organising the group and doing the work, or they become anxious and are less involved. Of course there are some who will just get on with the task along with everyone else.

Structure: a structured argument can be just as important in oral as in written work and some dyslexic students will find both difficult. PowerPoint can be a useful tool in this, and groups can also work it out together.