



Reporting on dyslexia: a good practice guide for media professionals

Dyslexia Scotland recognises media professionals as vital partners in building a dyslexia-friendly Scotland, and as powerful voices in reshaping outdated and inaccurate narratives.

This guide offers practical tips and resources to support accurate, respectful reporting.

What's in this guide?

This guide has 5 key sections to support media professionals:

- Insights from people with dyslexia
- Facts and figures
- Guidance on appropriate language, terminology and interviewing
- Common myths and facts to counter them
- Where to get further information.



We ask media professionals to use this guide when reporting on dyslexia in the Scottish context to:

- present a balanced, respectful view that recognises both the strengths and challenges of people with dyslexia
- report on facts of dyslexia; not perpetuate myths or stereotypes.

Dyslexia Scotland's vision is for a dyslexia-friendly Scotland where all people with dyslexia have their rights met and are able to reach their full potential. One of the key steps towards this outcome is for everyone in Scotland to understand what dyslexia is - and what it isn't. Appropriate representation in the media is a vital part of achieving this.

Who is this guide for?

This guide is for reporters, journalists and other media professionals who want clear, accessible advice on covering dyslexia in Scotland responsibly. Dyslexia is often misunderstood, so this resource is designed to be simple and practical, helping you produce informed and respectful media content.



Insights from people with dyslexia

The majority of adults with dyslexia in Scotland feel that the media often fails to accurately portray the diverse experiences of people with dyslexia, focusing instead on stereotypes or extreme cases. A 2024 study by Dyslexia Scotland and the University of Glasgow found that 71% of adults with dyslexia in Scotland feel the media misrepresents them.

While some portrayals are positive, they often focus on high-achieving individuals, which can set unrealistic expectations, overlooking the daily struggles of many people with dyslexia.

Nick's story

"People just don't understand. Dyslexia has always been the target of cheap jokes and base stereotypes. The problem is the system. Because of time constraints, the media relies on these stereotypes, feeding them back into society so that the same jokes and stereotypes are repeated."



Blanche's story

"Overall, I think things are moving in the right direction; it's recognised that there are strengths to being neurodivergent now, not just hindrances. People do also seem to be more accepting when they find out you're dyslexic, so I believe the general messaging surrounding dyslexia must be improving. I'd personally like to see other traits of dyslexia shared more widely to the public. I think the focus still seems heavily on reading and spelling issues but as any dyslexic person will tell you, there are many more aspects of your life that are affected, like short-term memory, word retrieval and computing certain information."



Facts and figures

What is dyslexia?

The Scottish Working definition of Dyslexia

In January 2009, the Scottish Government, Dyslexia Scotland and the Cross-Party Group on Dyslexia in the Scottish Parliament agreed on the following working definition:

Dyslexia can be described as a continuum of difficulties in learning to read, write and/or spell, which persist despite the provision of appropriate learning opportunities. These difficulties often do not reflect an individual's cognitive abilities and may not be typical of performance in other areas. The impact of dyslexia as a barrier to learning varies in degree according to the learning and teaching environment, as there are often associated difficulties such as:

- auditory and/or visual processing of language-based information
- phonological awareness
- oral language skills and reading fluency
- short-term and working memory
- sequencing and directionality
- number skills
- organisational ability.

Dyslexia exists in all cultures and across the range of abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. It is hereditary, lifelong and neurodevelopmental.

What challenges are related to dyslexia?

Someone with dyslexia can have difficulties with:

- Reading, writing and spelling
- Working memory – for example, remembering a set of instructions or holding a PIN number in your mind long enough to type it
- Processing speed – taking longer to name familiar things like colours, letters, or numbers.

Difficulties with phonological awareness, working memory and processing speed can make reading, writing and spelling harder. They can also affect everyday tasks at school, work and home, such as organisational skills.

Everyone is unique. Everyone with dyslexia is different and has individual strengths, difficulties and strategies that work for them. It is important that the individual develops their unique skills and interests, which can help manage some of their difficulties.

What can help?

- Early identification – being identified and having the right support early on in life leads to better attainment in school, greater confidence and more positive mental health.
- Inclusive learning and work environments that allow people to have effective adjustments to meet their individual needs, for example, in exams or at work.
- Skills in self-advocacy, to ask for the support that works best for them in any situation.

Contextual data on dyslexia in Scotland

- In 2024, Dyslexia Scotland and the University of Glasgow undertook Scotland's largest-ever survey of adults with dyslexia. The findings are available at dyslexiascotland.org.uk/report. The report provides useful statistics and contextual information about the systemic barriers to individuals with dyslexia in Scotland.
- The Pupil Census is a useful source of data on dyslexia in Scottish schools: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/pupil-census-supplementary-statistics/>.



Example statistics and facts

- Around one in ten people in Scotland are dyslexic.
- 80% of adults say the cost of independent assessment of dyslexia is a barrier to identification. (The cost for an independent assessment can range from £350 - £650.) (Source: Dyslexia Scotland - Towards A Dyslexia-Friendly Scotland?).
- 57% experience positive life changes as a result of being identified as dyslexic. (Source: Dyslexia Scotland - Towards A Dyslexia-Friendly Scotland?)
- 69% say that dyslexia has negatively impacted their education or career. (Source: Dyslexia Scotland - Towards A Dyslexia-Friendly Scotland?).
- 44% say that dyslexia is a disability to them. (Source: Dyslexia Scotland - Towards A Dyslexia-Friendly Scotland?).
- 36% of adults with dyslexia believe that dyslexia discrimination is a problem in Scotland. (Source: Dyslexia Scotland - Towards A Dyslexia-Friendly Scotland?).
- Women and girls with dyslexia are identified on average at least 2 years later than men and boys. (Source: Dyslexia Scotland - Towards A Dyslexia-Friendly Scotland?).
- Pupils with dyslexia still have lower attainment levels compared with pupils with no identified need (Source: Equality and human Rights Monitor – Is Scotland Fairer?).
- Statistics also evidence further inequality in attainment for pupils with dyslexia compared to other pupils with ASN (according to analysis of the Scottish Pupil Census supplementary statistics by the Scottish Children’s Services Coalition).
- Dyslexia exists in all cultures.
- Dyslexia often runs in the family – it’s largely genetic.
- It often co-occurs with other neurodivergences for example ADHD or dyscalculia.
- Dyslexia is not related to intelligence.
- Dyslexia can be recognised as a disability under the Equality Act (2010).

Language guide: how to talk about dyslexia

Use person-centred, respectful language. Avoid glamourising or pitying dyslexia. Here's a quick guide:

Use these ✓	Don't use these X
Identification, assessment of dyslexia, indicators of dyslexia	Diagnosis, diagnostic assessment, symptoms, treatment, cure or any other medical terminology
Learning difference/Specific learning difference	Disorder, learning disability, gift, superpower
People with dyslexia, dyslexic people, dyslexic community	People who have dyslexia, sufferers of dyslexia, dyslexics

Why?

- "Sufferers" implies pain and helplessness. Consider the social model of disability when reporting dyslexia – the problems are not within the person, they are in the person's environment.
- Diagnosis and "having dyslexia" implies a medical condition. Dyslexia is identified by qualified assessors, not doctors.
- Positive stereotypes can overshadow the real need for support and adjustments.

Representative imagery

Avoid images that perpetuate myths and stereotypes. For example, don't use images of letters jumping about. There is a table of myths and truths on page 10.

Tips for interviewing people with dyslexia

Dyslexia Scotland welcomes opportunities for people with dyslexia to tell their story. These tips will help you and the interviewee to get the best out of the interview.

- Give your interviewee the bigger picture of the report or topic and explain how their interview fits into the context.
- Ask questions one at a time (multi-part questions create cognitive load; they are difficult to process).
- If possible, give questions in advance to help the interviewee prepare answers.
- Allow the interviewee time to process your question before speaking again – count to 5 in your mind.
- Be sensitive. Children, young people and adults with dyslexia often face higher rates of mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression, due to various challenges. Academic struggles, social stigma, bullying and the continuous effort to manage their dyslexia in daily life contribute significantly to their emotional distress. The constant effort required to cope with dyslexia can lead to cognitive overload and mental fatigue, exacerbating these issues. Talking about negative experiences related to dyslexia can be emotional.



Myths versus truth

In 2025 Dyslexia Scotland undertook a survey of the general population of Scotland. This revealed that there are several outdated myths and stereotypes still prevalent in Scotland.

These are some common myths and the facts to counter them.

MYTHS	TRUTHS
Myth: People 'grow out' of dyslexia.	Truth: Dyslexia is lifelong but the important thing to remember is that with the right support, most people with dyslexia develop ways to overcome the difficulties.
Myth: Dyslexia doesn't exist.	Truth: Dyslexia exists in all cultures and across the range of abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. There is a wide range of research evidence about dyslexia, carried out by experts across the fields of education, genetics, design and neuroscience.
Myth: Dyslexia is just about reading and spelling.	Truth: As well as reading and spelling difficulties, people with dyslexia can also have difficulties such as short-term and working memory and processing speed. Other things that can be difficult are sequences, organisational skills and following directions.
Myth: People should go to the doctor to find out if they are dyslexic.	Truth: Doctors cannot tell you if you are dyslexic. Dyslexia is not a medical condition. Most people find out if they are dyslexic in school or by a qualified dyslexia assessor.
Myth: Dyslexia is an isolated learning difference.	Truth: Dyslexia often co-occurs with other difficulties like dyscalculia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Developmental Language Disorder (DLD).

MYTHS	TRUTHS
<p>Myth: Dyslexia only affects boys.</p>	<p>Truth: Both males and females can be dyslexic. Despite this, in our recent study, Dyslexia Scotland found out that girls and women are identified on average two years later than boys and men.</p>
<p>Myth: Coloured overlays will 'fix' dyslexia.</p>	<p>Truth: Coloured overlays are used to treat the effects of visual stress. Visual stress and dyslexia are different things, but some people have both. Coloured overlays and paper can help some people with visual stress, but they do not help specifically with dyslexia.</p>
<p>Myth: Identification of dyslexia isn't necessary.</p>	<p>Truth: Education in Scotland is needs-led, which means that children and young people do not need an identification, or 'label' of dyslexia, to get the support they need. However, knowing that there is a name for the difficulties they experience can be helpful for lots of children and young people.</p> <p>Adults often need an identification of dyslexia to ask for things like reasonable adjustments in the workplace; however, the cost of a private assessment for adults can be a huge barrier to this.</p>
<p>Myth: All people with dyslexia are creative</p>	<p>Truth: People with dyslexia have a wide range of strengths - just like everyone else. There's no solid evidence that dyslexia itself guarantees extra creativity, for example. It's important for each person to discover their own unique talents and to nurture them.</p>
<p>Myth: Comic Sans is the perfect typeface for people with dyslexia</p>	<p>Truth: Research shows that people with dyslexia can read different typefaces and will find ones that they prefer. Adjusting the space between letters and lines in type can make reading easier. Dyslexia Scotland has guidance on formatting for dyslexic readers.</p>

Where to go for more information on dyslexia in Scotland

Dyslexia Scotland

Dyslexia Scotland works to create a dyslexia-friendly Scotland where everyone with dyslexia has their rights met and can reach their full potential.

We do this by empowering individuals through increased awareness, earlier identification and better conditions in education, work and life.

We influence systems and attitudes by working with schools, employers, policymakers and communities to reduce stigma, build confidence, and create opportunities for people with dyslexia to thrive.

Do you still need more information?

Media enquiries can be addressed to:

- Chief Executive: cathy@dyslexiascotland.org.uk
- Lead for Creative and Digital: katie@dyslexiascotland.org.uk

Dyslexia Scotland
Cameron House
Forthside Way
Stirling
FK8 1QZ

email: info@dyslexiascotland.org.uk

phone: 01786 446650

web: dyslexiascotland.org.uk

Charity No. SC000951

