

**“I can’t be dyslexic,  
because I can read  
and spell!”**

## **Indicators of a compensated dyslexic**

Written by Chris Cole



## Important notice:

This booklet provides information about dyslexia and what it means to be a compensated dyslexic. For many, reading this can be the first time they feel truly understood. If you ever feel overwhelmed or need support while reading this, please know that specialist help is available. **Refer to the contact details on the last page.**

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## About Compensated Dyslexics

Compensated dyslexics are dyslexics who can read and write well enough to succeed in school, further education, and the workplace. Compensated dyslexics, like all dyslexics, possess unique strengths and talents, which include strong problem-solving skills, creativity and innovative thinking.

Quite often, compensated dyslexics do not know they are dyslexic but have a sense of not quite fitting in, not quite understanding how others can do it so easily, especially with study and reading, and may even have a sense of not being good enough. They tend to effectively mask any struggles they have using their efficient coping strategies.

### Why use the word compensated?

The main reason I started using the term 'compensated dyslexic' is because there is more information available about this group. But what does 'compensated dyslexic' mean? It describes 25% of dyslexics who have developed and utilised a variety of strategies to accommodate and succeed within 'the system'. They have adapted to being a neuro-minority in a world that doesn't easily recognise or acknowledge their way of thinking. These individuals are successful, resilient, and resourceful, valuable members of society.

## About this booklet

Information in this booklet comes from my experiences as an accountant, a compensated dyslexic, over 10 years of experience in the dyslexia/neurodiversity sector, and from conversations with other compensated dyslexics.

Not everything written in this booklet will necessarily resonate with you, as there is a diversity in how compensated dyslexics present. In my experience, dyslexic strengths are consistent among dyslexics; however, I see a wider variance within the challenges of dyslexic thinking. I believe this is due to the development of different compensating strategies by dyslexic individuals, which can be influenced by various factors.

These factors can include:

- Amount of parent or adult support during childhood
- Your individual executive functioning profile
- How long you have known you are dyslexic e.g. whether as a child or later as an adult.

Feel free to get in touch to let me know your thoughts.

I hope you find it useful.

Chris

(she/her/dyslexic)



## Characteristics of Compensated Dyslexics



### Reading, spelling and writing

#### Reading by 'gist'

- 'Gist' means dyslexics use their general knowledge, visual memory strengths, and problem-solving abilities to understand the overall meaning of what they are reading, without needing to understand every word.
- Reading fiction books or material on familiar subjects can make it easy for them to overlook words they don't know, yet still understand the overall meaning.
- Reading non-fiction, text heavy books or textbooks for study takes more effort and they may have to take many breaks, be limited to how long they can read and struggle to finish.
- They may have difficulty reading and understanding exam questions and math word problems, as it is important in these cases to understand the meaning of each word.

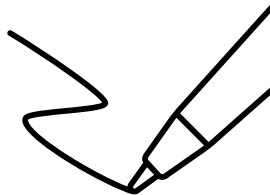
## Spelling

- Can be okay or excellent spellers.
- Tend to rely on their strong visual memory to spell. If they “can see the word in their head, they know how to spell it”. They are unlikely to effectively use sounding out to spell words.
- Can look at a misspelt word and think that doesn't look quite right but not know how to fix it.
- When proofing written work, they tend to rely on the shape of a word and may miss incorrect spelling if the shapes of similar words, such as, ‘does’ and ‘dose’ are visually similar.

## Writing

- When writing an email, report, essay etc they struggle to include “fluff”. Fluff refers to the extra words added to complete sentences or convey politeness, such as starting an email with “how are you doing?” before getting to the main information.
- Prefer to write in bullet points as it takes less brain power to think about what to write.

- Writing with bullet points means they can get the information down while they can remember what they want to say.
- Can have difficulty finding words to easily describe their ideas, thoughts or recommendations.
- They can use various words interchangeably to describe the same idea. For dyslexics this is because the underlying thought, picture, or sense of the concept remains consistent, regardless of the specific words they choose.







## Working style

### Focus

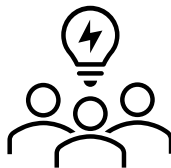
- They can enter a 'focus mode' which occurs when the big picture clicks and they can clearly see the connections and the solution to the issue at hand.
- When in 'focus mode' they can become blunt in their speech and writing.
- When in 'focus mode', if they are interrupted mid-flow and asked for clarification or details, it can break their focus and the idea is lost.
- When in 'focus mode', there is a strong need to 'blurt out' the thought or idea immediately because if they don't, it feels like it will disappear. This can lead to interrupting others while they are speaking, and it may seem to others that they are not paying attention to what is being discussed.

## Work around strategies

- They have developed effective strategies to manage their dyslexic challenges, such as writing everything down to remember it, especially when the information is given verbally.
- They often invest more time and effort in written tasks. They find it challenging to order and sequence their writing to ensure it flows logically and makes sense.
- They may find they have to reorder sentences because they seem to write 'backwards' (grammatically incorrect and awkwardly phrased).

For example:

- Original: ... 'having to add in additional words to make **correct reading sentences**.'
- Corrected: ... 'having to add in additional words to make **sentences read correctly**.'



## Thinking differently and at different speeds

- May find that their ideas are not understood easily or as quickly by other colleagues. Additionally, in attempting to help the colleagues understand their ideas they may struggle to explain them easily and clearly. This comes from seeing and feeling the answer but having difficulty finding the words to express this picture and feeling.
- They have a different way of seeing information, focusing on the big picture in a way that others may not. This strength enables them to connect information together in a deeper and unique way, naturally gravitating towards big-picture and conceptual thinking.
- Have a natural inclination towards solution thinking, seeking to improve through efficiency and effectiveness.
- Have a natural inclination to contribute to the greater good and improve things for others. They are often generous with their time and ideas, striving to improve systems and processes, and thereby improve people's well-being, often without seeking recognition and compensation\* for their efforts.

- They need to understand the bigger picture and how it connects to fully grasp ideas, concepts, and how to answer questions or complete tasks. Without this understanding, they will spend extra time and effort trying to work it out through additional research, asking questions or spending more time on the task. They are likely to keep it hidden that they don't understand the big picture preferring to work it out on their own.
- They tend to prefer having examples and templates to work with as it provides clarity on what is required. For instance, having a completed form as an example to refer to when completing their own form helps them understand how much detail is required for their answers. Without such a guide, they may struggle to provide the right amount of information, often giving either too little or too much.
- They can struggle to break the big ideas down into steps easily. Sequencing these steps to achieve a goal is difficult for them to do in their head, and it will take time and effort without support.



## Visual based strength

- Will take in and retain information easier if they can see it.
- When giving directions, they tend to use visual clues and hand gestures rather than directional language. For example, they might say 'go this way' while pointing with their hands 'when you see the white building with a blue door', instead of using a specific street name like 'West Street' with directional language such as 'turn right'.

## Autonomy

- Dyslexics, in general, prefer to have some autonomy over their work. This preference can manifest as control over their work hours, being in charge of a specific area at work, or working as a contractor, so they feel it's on their terms. This autonomy serves as a motivator and does not reduce productivity.

## Acceptance of change

- Their dyslexic thinking can make them more open to new ideas and ways of doing things. They can see change as an opportunity for innovation and improvement.

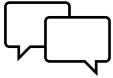
- Big picture thinking helps them see change as part of a larger process.



## Masking

- Masking is an automatic coping strategy for dyslexics that develops during their schooling years, whether or not they are aware of their dyslexia. They mask their struggles using a variety of strategies. For instance, they may spend more time and effort than their peers to keep up with their workload, spending extra time and effort trying to understand instructions and/or rely heavily on visual memory to retain information and pass exams.
- Masking consumes a large amount of energy. Consequently, they are likely to struggle during periods of transition, as learning new things requires more brain power and energy. When faced with such transitions, their normal coping strategies aren't as effective leading to increased anxiety. Periods of transition include starting a new role, working with a new manager, beginning a new job, experiencing high-stress situations outside of work, or encountering changes in systems.

- Masking is also associated with anxiety, particularly the fear of being unmasked and perceived as unintelligent. Examples of what can cause anxiety, vary for dyslexics but relate to their difficulties, such as pronouncing words or verbally given information like email addresses or phone numbers. In these situations, anxiety spikes and takes the brain offline, impairing cognitive function.
- Being in a situation that requires masking, and numerous strategies to keep up in the workplace or with studies, can lead to burnout.
- While they have a natural inclination to work for the greater good, continued lack of \*recognition and reward of their value and effort can lead them to become disgruntled and hurt, especially after 'having given so much'.



## Communication

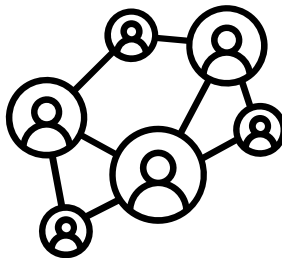
### Intuitive communication style

- Their proficiency in reading people and instinctively understanding group dynamics allows them to foster cohesion within teams or groups, increasing involvement and enhancing workshops or meetings.
- If they are under stress and heavily masking, their intuitive communication style can make them sensitive to perceived negative communication from colleagues.
- They prefer explicit and clear communication and instructions to avoid using unnecessary brainpower deciphering their meaning. Verbal feedback becomes especially confusing when the body language contradicts the spoken words or when too many words are used.



## Simplification of information

- They have an ability to take large amounts of seemingly unconnected information and simplify it into an easier to understand version. They may do this with diagrams, stories or verbally.
- They have a range of mental frameworks for organising ideas and concepts, allowing new information to integrate easily and quickly. If they don't have the full picture they will research to add more information to these mental frameworks.



## Definition of dyslexic thinking



### Strengths

**Big picture thinker:** Excel at seeing the overall concept or idea rather than getting lost in details.

**Solution focused and problem solver:** Approach challenges with a focus on finding solutions, often thinking creatively and outside the box.

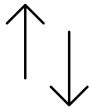
**Visual based learner:** Learn best through visual aids and hands-on experiences, using images and spatial skills to understand and retain information.

**Has deep empathy:** Have a heightened sensitivity to other's emotions and experiences, allowing them to connect deeply with people and understand diverse perspectives.

**Connects to greater good:** Often have a strong sense of purpose and are motivated to contribute positively to society, wanting to make meaningful impacts and promote social change.

**Curiosity:** Like to explore new ideas and seek knowledge.

## Definition of dyslexic thinking



### Challenges

#### **More effort to easily learn to read, write and spell:**

Typically need more time and effort to master these skills due to difficulty with language processing.

#### **Difficulty with ordering and sequencing information:**

Organising information in a logical sequence can be challenging, affecting tasks like following instructions or expressing ideas coherently.

#### **Short term memory challenges (visual and/or auditory):**

Difficulty remembering visual or auditory information over short periods, which can impact learning and daily tasks.

#### **Increased effort to process auditory information:**

Harder for the brain to process spoken language quickly or accurately, affecting listening comprehension.

**Risk of anxiety and low self-esteem:** Unsupported or unrecognised dyslexia can lead to anxiety and low self-esteem, particularly when individuals perceive their difficulties as failures or shortcomings. Access to appropriate support and strategies is crucial in managing these challenges and fostering positive self-worth and well-being.

## Dyslexic thinking advantages in the workplace

Thinking style that leads to innovation:

- Seeing the larger context of a problem or project without being caught in the details.
- Approaching problems in unconventional ways.
- Providing original solutions that others may not consider.

Ability to influence:


- Building, supporting and empowering teams, colleagues, and clients.
- Demonstrating leadership through their ability to connect and influence others.

Communication style:

- Simplifying complex subjects and explaining them in an understandable manner.

Adaptability:

- Being curious about and exploring new ideas and concepts.
- Acceptance of change as an opportunity for innovation and improvement.



**'Dyslexics are like  
diamonds; they just  
need the right  
environment to shine!'**

Erin Brockovich

## Compensated dyslexia checklist

(Not all items may apply)

- Enjoys reading.
- Reads by gist (work out the meaning even though don't they understand all the words).
- Finds it takes more effort to read text-heavy books or articles.
- Can spell well and relies on visual memory for spelling.
- Prefers writing information in bullet points, without using extra words.
- Becomes blunt and to the point in writing or speaking when focusing on an idea or task.
- Spends more time and effort on written tasks.
- Thinks differently from colleagues.
- Grasps ideas and concepts more quickly and easily than colleagues.
- Struggles to easily and clearly articulate ideas and thoughts (especially in a group).

- Has a natural inclination to make processes more effective and efficient.
- Needs to understand the big picture of a task or project before knowing how to start it.
- Retains information easier when seeing it.
- Masks any struggles with retaining information, not understanding the big picture, writing, or reading tasks.
- Has an intuitive communication style.
- Prefers clear and explicit communication to avoid spending time trying to work out 'what did they mean?'
- Has an ability to take complex concepts and information and simplify them.
- Often has a strong sense of justice and fairness.
- Skilled at identifying patterns and connections within the environment, among individuals and with information.
- Prefers autonomy in the workplace.

For more support or information  
contact:

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