



Factsheet: Background to visual and reading difficulties and assessments

It's really important to realise that if you have a reading disability or visual impairment, the test administrators, designers and corporate law firm are obliged to enter into both the letter and spirit of helping you. Once you have all the 'reasonable adjustments' successfully implemented (if and only if, rather), it is perfectly possible for you to 'train' to become good at these tests.

Reading difficulty (dyslexia)

Dyslexia can be a legally recognised disability depending on its severity. Therefore, when applicants or candidates are being assessed, the qualified test user should have due regard to the employment provisions of the **Disability Discrimination Act (1995)** or **Equality Act (2010)** [<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>]; this makes it unlawful for an employer to treat a disabled person less favourably than a non-disabled person without good reason.

Discrimination is outlawed in a wide range of employment activities including selection, promotion and training. Employers have a duty to make "reasonable adjustments" to selection processes and working conditions so that disabled persons are not placed at a substantial disadvantage

The definition of the British Dyslexia Association mentions the impact dyslexia can have on other functions as well as literacy.

The BDA defines dyslexia as:

'A combination of abilities and difficulties which affect the learning process in one or more of reading, spelling and writing. Accompanying weaknesses may be identified in areas of speed processing, short-term memory, sequencing, auditory and/or visual perception, spoken language and motor skills. It is particularly related to mastering and using written language, which may include alphabetic, numeric and musical notation.'

In selection for a training contract, an individual with dyslexia is likely to encounter difficulty with tests of verbal reasoning, spelling and functional literacy. The law requires that accommodations are made for disabled people including those with dyslexia to ensure that selection procedures do not disadvantage them. The employer is concerned with eliciting accurate information on abilities to use in making decisions.

The standardised nature of these tests is one of the main contributors to their effectiveness and objectivity. Arbitrary modifications to the test or administration procedure are likely to invalidate the results and render standard norm groups and score interpretations meaningless.

A common modification for individuals with dyslexia is to adjust the timing of the test. However, the amount of extra time required will depend on the way the dyslexia manifests itself, its severity, the test(s) being used and their relationship to the job requirements. Only a relevant professional can determine what is appropriate.

Whether adjustments have been made to standard test procedures or not, careful administration can help ensure that individuals with dyslexia have a fair opportunity to demonstrate their skills.

As with many disabilities, stress may exacerbate the impact of dyslexia. Therefore, a calm and understanding approach on the part of the administrator is important.

People with dyslexia may have difficulty with test instructions. This can be due to reading difficulties, or to a difficulty with short term memory and/or sequencing which is common with dyslexia.

Useful contacts

The British Dyslexia Association

98 London Road,
Reading, RG1 5AU.
Helpline: 0118 966 8271.

Tel: 0118 966 2677.
Fax: 0118 935 1927.
E-mail: info@dyslexiahelp-bda.demon.co.uk.
Website: <http://www.bda-dyslexia.org.uk>

Disability Rights Commission

DRC Helpline
FREEPOST MID02164
Stratford upon Avon, CV37 9BR.

Tel: 08457 622 633
Fax: 08457 778 878
Textphone: 08457 622 644
E-mail: enquiry@drc-gb.org
Website: <http://www.drc-gb.org>

Visual impairments and the law

A person who is registered or certified blind or partially sighted is automatically regarded as disabled under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). However, even without registration, it is likely that a person with significantly limited vision which is not easily corrected using glasses or contact lenses will be considered disabled under the provisions of the Act.

The DDA makes it unlawful for an employer to treat a disabled person less favourably than a nondisabled person and those who provide services must make them accessible to clients with disabilities. When tests are being used in connection with employment

(e.g. in making selection decisions) employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled persons are not placed at a substantial disadvantage.

Disabled individuals have the right to expect the same quality of service, including accuracy of diagnostics and assessment as other users of the service.

About visual impairments

Visual impairment covers a wide range of conditions.

Even a person who is registered blind may have some residual vision, e.g. the ability to discern light from dark or even quite good acuity within a severely limited field of vision.

Partial sight also covers many different types of conditions. These can range from very blurred vision to loss of some areas of the field of vision. For some people the act of focusing can be difficult, this can mean that reading difficult, as it is necessary to constantly refocus on the next portion of text.

A visual impairment may occur alone or in combination with other conditions.

Some people are born with visual impairments or have lived with the disability for a long time and have been taught or developed their own strategies for coping with both the practical difficulties of living and dealing with information usually presented in text form. For those with more residual vision, texts are typically accessed using large print and/or various magnification and lighting aids. Aids can include powerful spectacle lenses, free-standing magnifiers placed on top of a text, often with an integral light source.

Impact on testing

Any task where materials are presented visually, whether on paper, computer screen or as objects to be manipulated, will cause difficulty for a visually impaired person. This will include the vast majority of psychometric tests.

In order to assess a person with a visual disability, it is likely to be necessary to make adjustments to standardised test administration procedures, use alternate forms of materials, or both. However, such changes to a test cannot be made without affecting its reliability and validity.

The standardised nature of psychometric tests is one of the main contributors to their effectiveness and objectivity, and arbitrary modifications to the test or administration procedure are likely to invalidate the results and render standard norm groups and score interpretations meaningless. Some test takers may want to bring along some special equipment or ask for specific lighting conditions.

Practical advice during the testing session

Whether adjustments have been made to standard test procedures or not, careful administration can help ensure that the test results for someone with a visual impairment remain valid.

- A calm and understanding approach on the part of the administrator is important.
- If test administration times are greatly extended consider whether breaks are needed to prevent you / the candidate from becoming overtired.
- Make a note any adjustments made, or any other non-standard occurrences.
- If further advice is required in interpreting the results, make sure you consult the recruiter from your corporate law firm, who may wish to contact the test publisher or consult with a Chartered Psychologist with expertise in visual impairment.

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