

## Structured literacy

There has been increased use of the word Structured literacy by schools as part of their reading and spelling programmes. This article is a brief overview to help parents understand what it is and some of the words associated with structured literacy as well as why it works for dyslexics.

What is structured literacy?

- Structured literacy is a term used to explain an approach to teaching reading and spelling.
- This approach is multi-sensory, explicit, systematic and monitored.

**Multi-sensory** means using a variety of methods to teach content that incorporates speaking, listening, reading, writing and movement. For example, using magnetic letters for spelling and well as saying them and writing them.

Dyslexic advantage

- a variety of methods supports their short-term memory challenges.

**Explicit** means clear and direct instructions on what the student is to learn. Lessons use consistent language and follow similar steps each time.

Dyslexic advantage

- Being predictable and routine means the dyslexic student “knows” what is coming up so their anxiety reduces and their brain has more space ready for their learning.
- Using less words to explain what they are learning means the dyslexic student doesn’t have to listen and process a lot of information to get the big picture of what is required.
- When different teachers come to teach the dyslexic student since there is a consistency in language and the steps, they are more likely to have less anxiety as they know what is happening.

**Systematic** means there is a set process for what is taught and in what order. It moves from simple to more complex, working in an order that builds on the knowledge learnt.

Dyslexic advantage

- This supports the dyslexic students sequencing and ordering challenges.

**Monitoring** is checking for gaps in knowledge or when a student has mastered learning the content. This is done using a variety of assessments such as observations or standardised tests. Information gathered from these assessments means the structured literacy approach will be adapted to the student’s needs.

Dyslexic advantage

- Timely adaptations to increase ability to take in the content.

## **Key components of a structured literacy approach**

**Phoneme awareness:** This is understanding the individual sounds that make up words. There are approximately 44 sounds. These include the single vowels, groups of vowels and consonants. This is an auditory only process.

Phonological awareness screening checks students' ability to identify these individual sounds.

It includes being able to

- Segment sounds – take apart sounds in spoken words.
- Blending sounds – putting together sounds to make words.
- Deleting – leaving out or substituting sounds

**Phonics:** This is when the sounds are matched with letters.

The written symbols (graphemes) can be the alphabet letters and also letter combinations (ch, oa, th etc)

**Patterns and rules of print:** This is learning certain letter patterns and rules used when writing.

Also called orthography examples include:

- Spelling consonant sounds such as - ck and- tch after using short vowels.
- The combination of qu-
- The different types of syllables e.g. open or closed

**Pre-fixes, suffixes:** Learning these with root words

Also called morphology these are groups of letters that can be added to or used within words.

Examples include de-, dis- , -ment, -ful

**Syntax:** This is the system for ordering words in sentences.

It covers the different sentence structures such as simple, compound and complex sentences as well as punctuation and grammar.

**Semantics:** This is understanding words in context and vocabulary development

A structured literacy approach is beneficial for dyslexic students. It gives them an excellent tool for their reading and spelling.

What makes a structured literacy approach even better for a dyslexic student -

- They have enough time to learn the content. It is going to take their dyslexic brains longer.

- By providing the big picture of where they are going. Even though it builds on knowledge learnt, the dyslexic needs to know where they are heading (big picture) to further grasp understanding.
- More than just being multi-sensory it is the tone of voice and body language used by the teacher that is critical for the dyslexic students' brain to relax to increase their ability to retain content.
- There is a rapport between student and teacher so the dyslexic student feels relaxed and can take in more content.
- The teacher uses targeted and specific feedback when monitoring progress of the dyslexic student.

Other information:

Decodable texts: are based on the sounds the student is focusing on in their structured literacy programme at the time.

Decoding: This is reading a word and sounding it out to say the word. (reading)

Encoding: This is writing the word from the sounds. (spelling)

Additional resource and useful links:

[Lifting Literacy Aotearoa](#)

<https://www.understood.org/en/articles/what-is-structured-literacy>

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