

Learning is not one skill

A visual guide to adult learning differences, evaluation, and support.

Specific learning disabilities can affect one or more skill areas. A difficulty in one area does not describe a person's overall intelligence or potential. [1, 16]

LEARNING AREA	POSSIBLE BARRIER	A ROUTE TO EXPLORE
Reading	Recognizing words accurately or fluently; spelling. →	Reading instruction plus audio access when useful. [2, 6]
Writing	Getting ideas onto a page; spelling or organizing text. →	Draft first, then edit. Consider dictation. [1, 10]
Math	Quantity, number facts, calculations or reasoning. →	Worked models, labeled steps and permitted tools. [1, 12]

Terminology matters

This guide uses the U.S. specific-learning-disability meaning. In the UK, "learning disability" usually refers to intellectual disability. [11]

One label cannot explain everything

A useful explanation considers the skill, the history, and the situation.

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- **Specific learning disability** Persistent difficulty developing particular academic skills. A person may have strengths elsewhere. [1]
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- **Intellectual disability** Broader intellectual and everyday adaptive-support needs. Specific LD and intellectual disability are different concepts. [1, 11]
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- **Access or opportunity barriers** Interrupted schooling, language mismatch, inaccessible teaching, hearing or vision needs can affect learning. These deserve attention in assessment. [1]
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- **Co-occurring conditions** ADHD, anxiety or other conditions may add barriers. They do not automatically explain, establish or rule out a learning disability. [1]

THE SAME TASK CAN HAVE DIFFERENT BOTTLENECKS

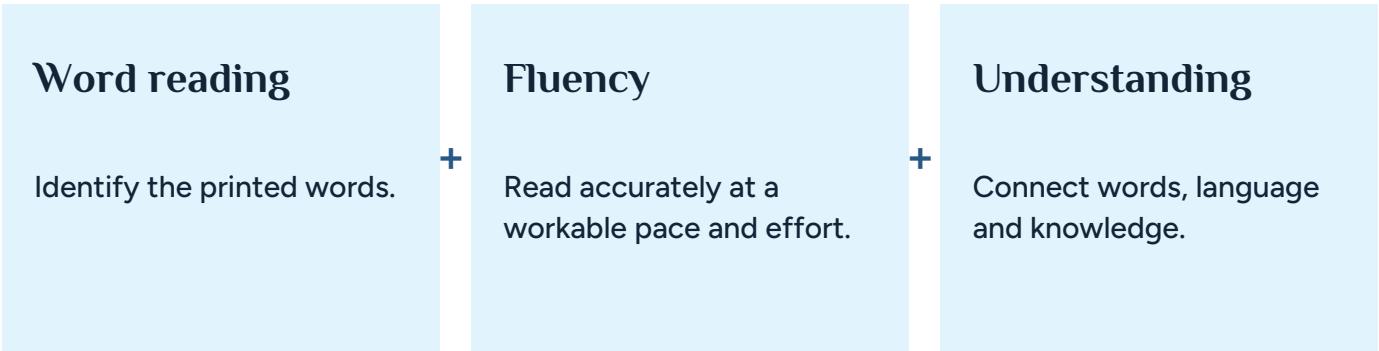
"I cannot finish this report" could involve spelling, planning, reading the brief, fatigue, anxiety, or several of these. Look at the difficult step before choosing a tool.

This guide is educational. It cannot diagnose a condition or determine service eligibility.

Reading: accuracy, speed, meaning

Dyslexia can persist even when a person has found successful ways to compensate.

The 2025 IDA definition emphasizes word reading and/or spelling, including accuracy and speed. Sound- and word-part processing difficulties are common, not universal. Influences are multifactorial. [2, 3]



A useful reading profile separates these demands; slow reading does not mean weak ideas. [1]

ACCESS TO THE CONTENT

Audio or text-to-speech may reduce the decoding load. Check understanding and whether the format suits the task. [6]

DEVELOPING A SKILL

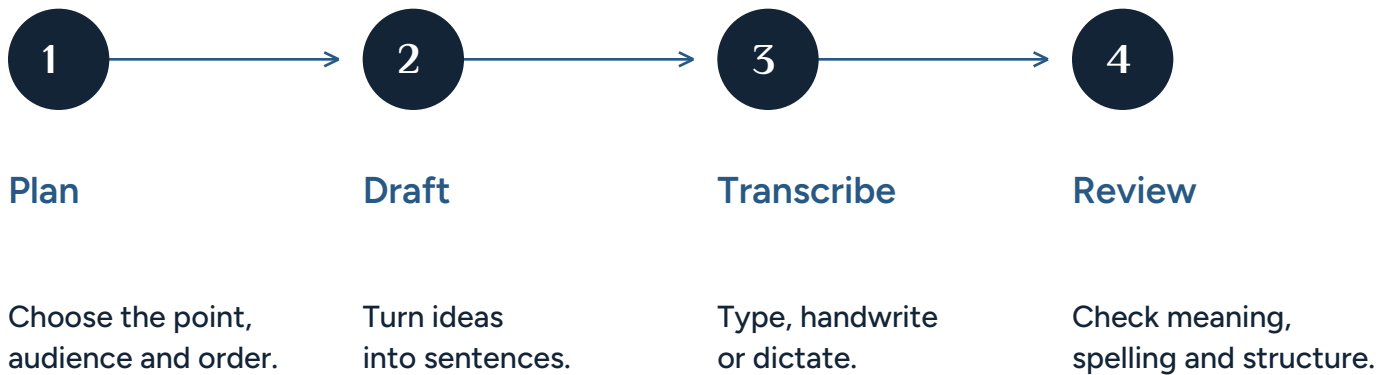
Individualized literacy instruction may help. Adult studies are fewer and more varied than the child literature. [4]

Recent evidence, with limits

A small Italian study published online in 2024 (2025 issue) found gains in selected reading and spelling skills. Ages were 16-30; findings do not establish one best program for all adults or languages. [5]

Writing has several moving parts

Match the support to the part that is difficult, rather than treating all writing as one skill.



These steps overlap and repeat. A person may explain an idea aloud yet find one or more written steps effortful. Terms such as “dysgraphia” are used differently; clarify the actual difficulty. [1, 16]

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE / A WORK EMAIL

Instead of composing and correcting every sentence at once:

Three bullet points → **Dictated draft** → **Accuracy check**

Read back names, dates and meaning. Dictation can introduce errors. [6, 12]

Keep access and authorship together

A template can reduce planning load while the ideas remain yours. Tools should support the chosen task and follow workplace or course rules. [10, 12]

Math is more than calculation

Dyscalculia is commonly used for specific difficulties learning mathematics. [1]

Quantity

Comparing amounts or estimating.

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●

Symbols

Connecting numerals with quantities.

5 → ● ● ● ● ●

Procedures

Holding the order of calculation steps.

1 → 2 → 3

Real-world use

Time, money, measures or schedules.

14:30 → 2:30 pm

A profile may involve some of these demands, not all. Difficulties with numbers can also have other explanations. Assessment matters. [1, 16]

MAKE THE STEPS VISIBLE

For a bill: label amount, due date and payment step separately. Use a checked calculator or template where allowed. [12]

WHAT RESEARCH CAN SAY

A 2025 study of 18 university students described everyday barriers. Adult dyscalculia intervention evidence is still limited. Lived experience is not a treatment trial. [8, 9]

The supports shown are practical options to individualize, not a proven adult dyscalculia protocol.

Assessment should lead to a plan

Ask a qualified clinician experienced in adult learning assessment what the evaluation will answer. [1]

1

Start with the question

Is the goal explanation, targeted instruction, workplace access, or college documentation? Ask about cost, scope and relevant expertise.

2

Bring the history and context

Use available school records, past supports and current task examples. Discuss language, education, health, sensory access and co-occurring concerns.

3

Look at skills and daily impact

A full evaluation integrates standardized measures with history and functioning. One score, an online quiz or an IQ gap is not the whole assessment.

4

Translate findings into next steps

Request plain-language results, specific support options and a review plan. Check the institution's documentation requirements in advance. [1, 14]

A sudden change needs a different response

Sudden new trouble speaking, understanding, reading or writing can be a medical emergency. Call emergency services; do not assume it is a lifelong learning disability. [15]

Two routes can work together

Access now and skill development answer different questions. Neither has to wait for the other. [10]



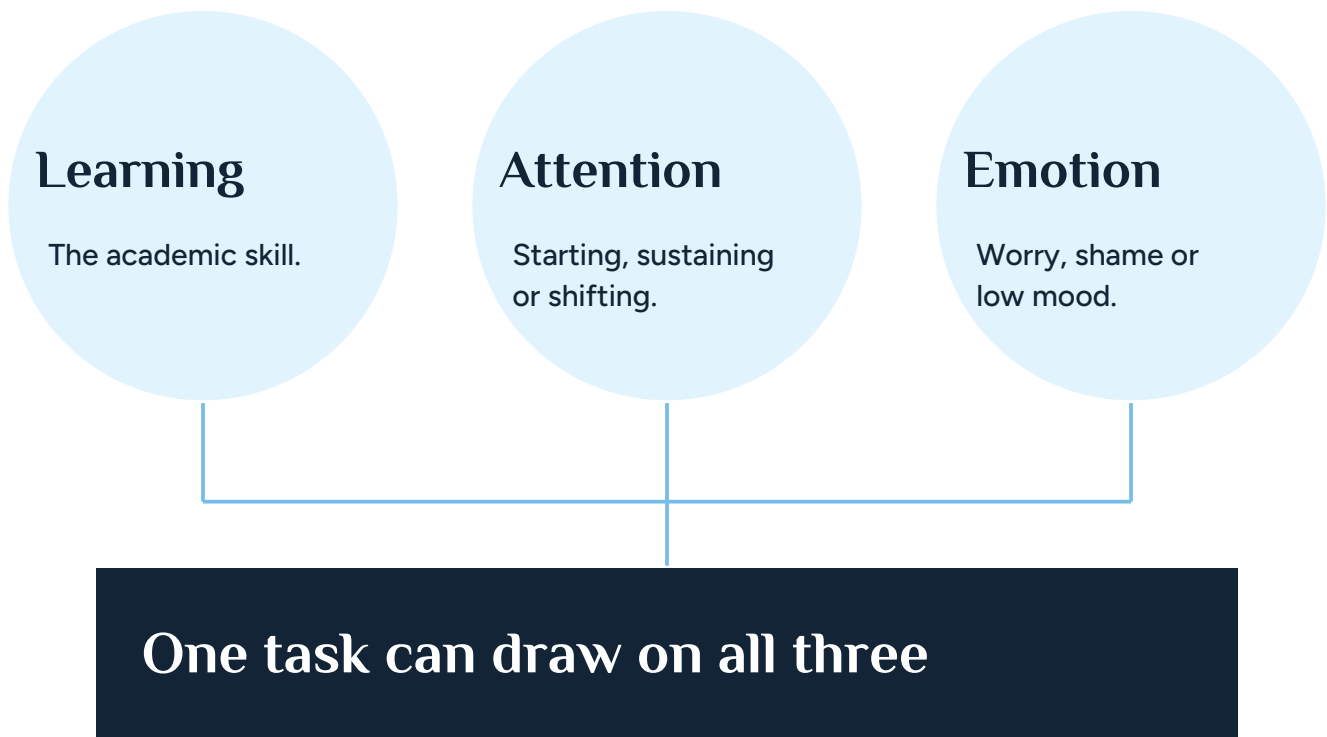
TOOL	POSSIBLE FIT	CHECK
Text-to-speech	Reading the words is the bottleneck.	Check comprehension and pronunciation.
Speech-to-text	Transcription blocks the draft.	Review errors and private content.
Templates / tools	Planning or calculation needs structure.	Check fit, permissions and accuracy.

A 2017 review covered adolescents and adults and found varied results. It supports careful matching, not a promise that a tool will help everyone. It does not validate today’s AI products. [6, 12]

For any digital tool: protect confidential data, verify generated content, and follow task rules.

Learning and wellbeing interact

Ask what else is making a task difficult without assuming one explanation accounts for everything.



This is an interaction map, not a causal model or a way to diagnose ADHD or anxiety. Co-occurring conditions need their own assessment and care. [1]

What a recent synthesis found

A meta-analysis published online in 2023 (2024 issue) found more internalizing difficulties, including anxiety and depression, among people with learning difficulties. Its samples spanned children through younger adults. Association does not tell us what caused what. [7]

Practical implication: address distress and access barriers alongside the learning goal.

Ask for the change that helps

A clear request connects a task barrier with a specific adjustment.

1

Describe the task barrier

"Dense written instructions take me much longer to process."

2

Suggest a workable adjustment

"Could I get a structured checklist and an accessible digital copy?"

3

Discuss the process

At work, use the accommodation contact or HR. In college, contact disability/access services. Ask what documentation is needed.

4

Review the actual result

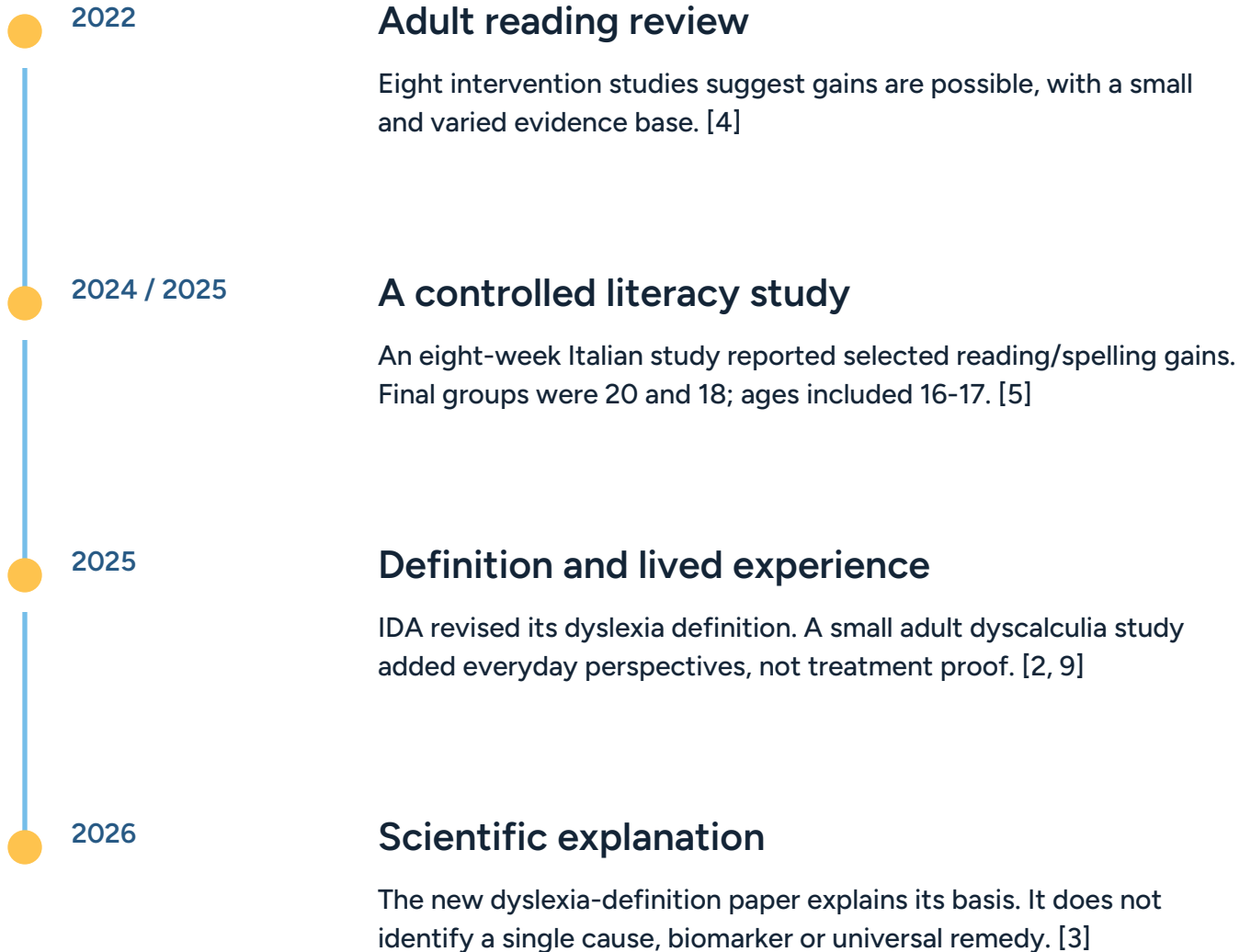
Check accuracy, effort, timeliness and access. If the first option does not fit, discuss another. [12-14]

A useful distinction

Support options and legal eligibility are different questions. U.S. employment and postsecondary rules are context-specific; a diagnosis does not automatically guarantee every requested change. This is general information, not legal advice. [13, 14]

What changed in the evidence?

Recent publication is useful, but population and study design determine what we can conclude.



The practical conclusion

Match the intervention to the skill and the tool to the task. Adult writing, math and modern assistive-tech evidence remains thinner than broad marketing claims imply. Ask what changed, for whom, compared with what, and for how long. [4, 6, 8]

Sources & evidence

Linked references. Research and public guidance checked October 14, 2026.

- [1] **American Psychiatric Association. What are specific learning disorders?**
Current public guidance • Clinical public guidance

- [2] **International Dyslexia Association. 2025 definition of dyslexia.**
Adopted 2025-10-22 • Consensus definition

- [3] **Catts, Haynes & Joshi. Defining dyslexia: 2025 revision. Annals of Dyslexia.**
Online 2026-04-29 • Consensus / narrative scientific rationale

- [4] **Vender, Melloni & Delfitto. The effectiveness of reading intervention in adults with developmental dyslexia: a systematic review.**
2022 • Systematic review; 8 studies

- [5] **Vender & Delfitto. Bridging the gap in adult dyslexia research. Annals of Dyslexia, 75:42-70.**
Online 2024-09-23; issue 2025 • Small controlled intervention study

- [6] **Perelmutter, McGregor & Gordon. Assistive technology interventions for adolescents and adults with learning disabilities. Computers & Education, 114:139-163.**
2017-11 • Systematic review and meta-analysis

- [7] **Vieira et al. Internalizing problems in individuals with reading, mathematics and unspecified learning difficulties. Annals of Dyslexia, 74:4-26.**
Online 2023-12-22; issue 2024 • Systematic review and meta-analysis; 96 studies

- [8] **UK Department for Education. Numeracy skills interventions for adults (19+): systematic review.**
2023-01-26 • Government-commissioned systematic review

Sources & evidence

Linked references. Research and public guidance checked October 14, 2026.

- [9] **Staller et al. Neurodivergent conditions critically limit societal participation: the case of dyscalculia in adults. Neurodiversity.**
Online 2025-12-29 • Qualitative thematic study

- [10] **NICHD. How can I help my adult child with learning disabilities?**
Last reviewed 2018 • Public support guidance

- [11] **NHS. Learning disabilities.**
Current public guidance • Terminology / public guidance

- [12] **Job Accommodation Network. Learning disability.**
Current public guidance • Accommodation guidance

- [13] **U.S. EEOC. Reasonable accommodation and undue hardship under the ADA.**
2002-10-17 • U.S. enforcement guidance

- [14] **U.S. Department of Education. Academic adjustments for postsecondary students.**
Page last reviewed 2025-01-14 • U.S. civil-rights guidance

- [15] **NINDS. Stroke signs and symptoms; stroke overview.**
Current public guidance • Emergency health guidance

- [16] **NICHD. Learning disabilities: condition information.**
Current public guidance • Public health overview