

Letter to Sawyer

Understanding dyslexia in student-friendly language

Dear Sawyer,

I want to explain your dyslexia in a way that makes sense to you.

First, dyslexia does not mean you are not smart. In fact, your evaluation showed that you have a lot of strengths. You have strong vocabulary, strong listening comprehension, very strong reasoning skills, and a good memory for things you have learned. Those strengths help you understand big ideas, make connections, and do well in school.

Your dyslexia shows up most when you have to deal with new or unfamiliar words, especially words that are long, technical, or hard to sound out. This means your brain has to work harder than other students' brains when you are trying to break words into sounds, blend sounds together, or quickly read words you have never seen before. That is why classes like science and foreign language may feel harder, even though you are capable of understanding the material.

A good way to think about it is this: your brain is strong at understanding ideas, but reading new words does not always become automatic as easily as it does for other people. You may need more time, more repetition, or more direct teaching to make unfamiliar words stick. Once a word becomes familiar, though, you often do much better with it.

Your testing also showed that you are especially strong with familiar words, vocabulary, and patterns you already know. That means you have probably been using your intelligence, memory, and reasoning skills to make up for the parts of reading that are harder. This is one reason dyslexia can be easy to miss in students who are bright and hardworking. You may look like you are doing fine on the outside, while inside the work is taking more effort and more time than it should.

Because of dyslexia, you might notice that:

- reading new academic vocabulary is harder than understanding it once someone explains it
- long homework assignments can take more time
- spelling unfamiliar words can be frustrating
- timed reading or writing tasks may feel harder than untimed ones

- classes with lots of technical terms may feel more draining

The important thing to know is that dyslexia is not a weakness in effort. It is a difference in how your brain processes written language. With the right support, you can keep succeeding in school while making reading and writing less exhausting. Things like extra time, explicit instruction, help with vocabulary, text-to-speech, and breaking assignments into smaller parts can make a real difference.

You have already shown that you are capable, resilient, and smart. Dyslexia is just one part of how you learn. It may make some parts of school harder, but it does not define what you are able to achieve. With the right tools and strategies, you can continue to be a successful student and use your many strengths to your advantage.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Rutgers