Free Parent Resource

Understanding Dyslexia and the Brain

A Parent-Friendly Guide to Structured Literacy and Hope

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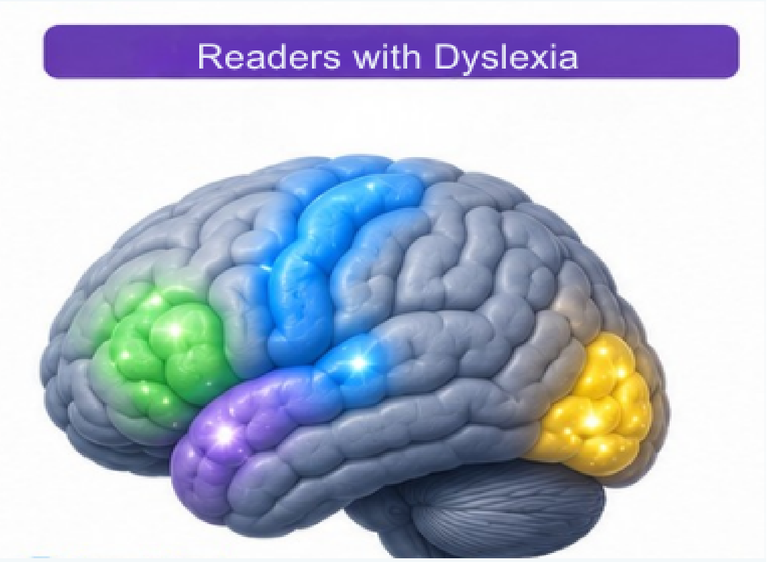


Reduced and less widespread activation in key reading areas.

WHY READING FEELS HARD

Two Brains, Two Paths

All 3 AREAS ACTIVE

- ✓ **Automatic & fluent**
  Reading feels effortless
- ✓ **Less brain energy used**
  Efficient per word processed
- ✓ **Fast, accurate decoding**
  Sounds and letters connect quickly
- ✓ **Confidence builds fast**
  Success motivates more reading

Reading pathway: STRONG

VS

DECODING AREAS UNDERACTIVE

- ! **Reading takes more effort**
  Every word requires extra work
- ! **Brain finds alternate paths**
  Compensates — but less efficiently
- ! **Guessing & memorizing**
  May not decode sounds reliably
- ! **Confidence & motivation drop**
  Struggle leads to avoidance

Reading pathway: NEEDS SUPPORT

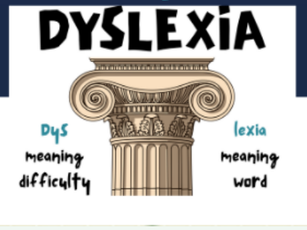
Students with dyslexia need specialized instruction —
not just more practice or harder work.
Their brains are working differently, not less.

DEFINITION

What Is Dyslexia?

> **Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along a continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual's peers.**
>
> *International Dyslexia Association*

Neurobiological
In origin — not a choice or an effort issue



Word Recognition
Affects reading fluency, accuracy & decoding

Bright & Capable
Intelligence is NOT affected by dyslexia

Dyslexia is NOT caused by laziness,
low intelligence, or poor parenting.

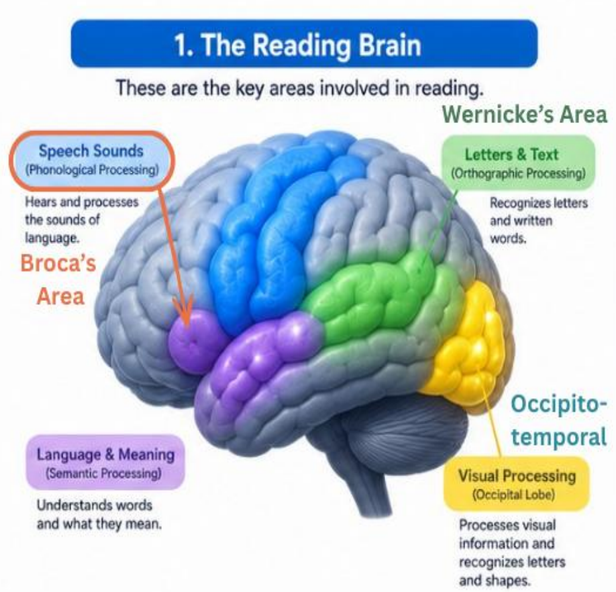
THE READING BRAIN

How the Reading Brain Works

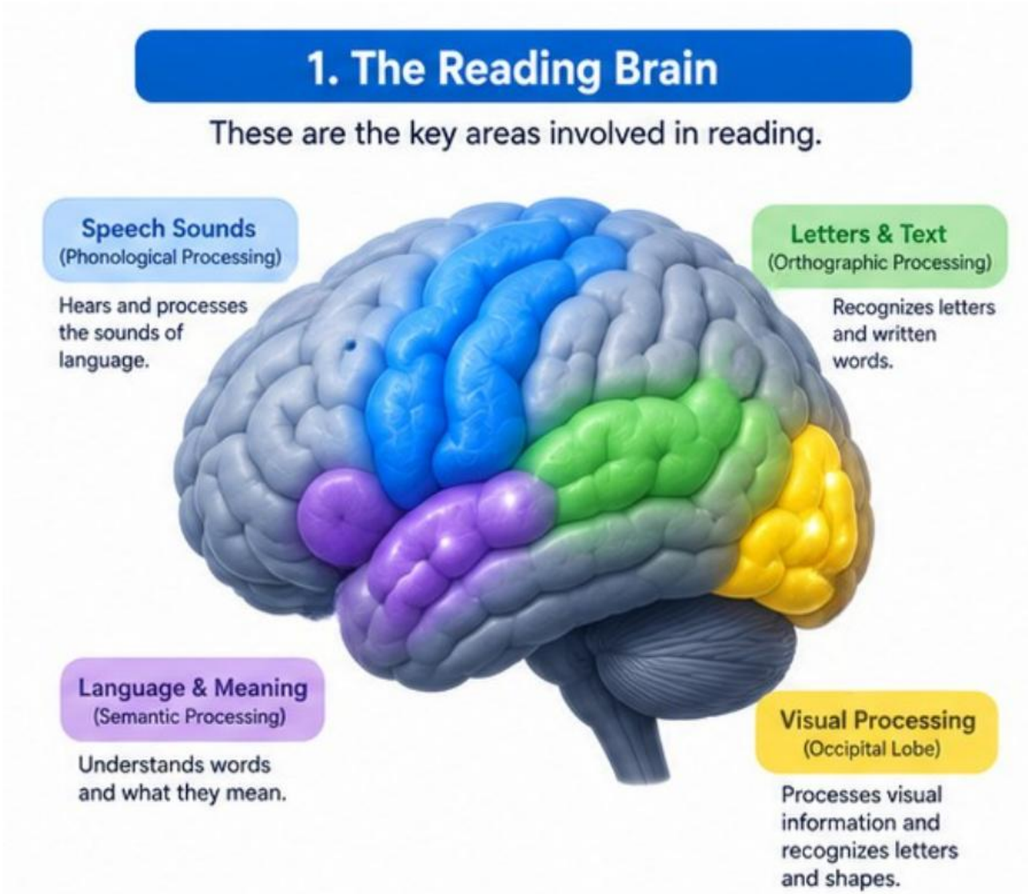
Broca's Area
Hears sequences of speech sounds
Processes phonological information

Wernicke's Area
Decoding hub of the brain
Links sounds to letters for reading

Occipito-temporal
Visual word processing center
Builds "sight word" recognition bank



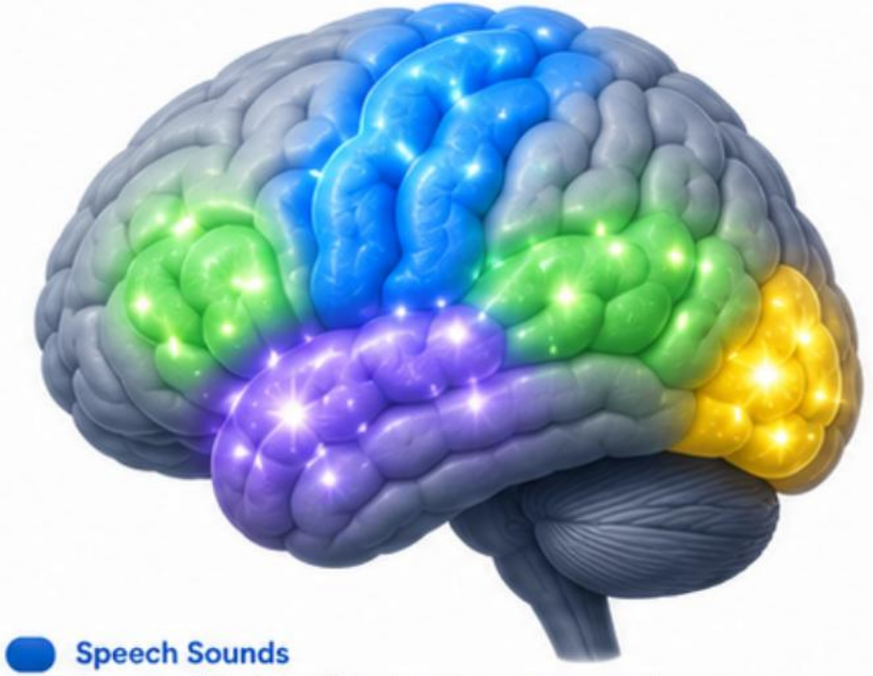
Efficient readers use all three areas together to process language.



All these areas working together
makes reading accurate, fluent, and meaningful.

2. Typical Readers

Strong, widespread activation in key reading areas.



Speech Sounds
Strong activity helps decode and sound out words.

Letters & Text
Strong activity helps recognize letters and words quickly.

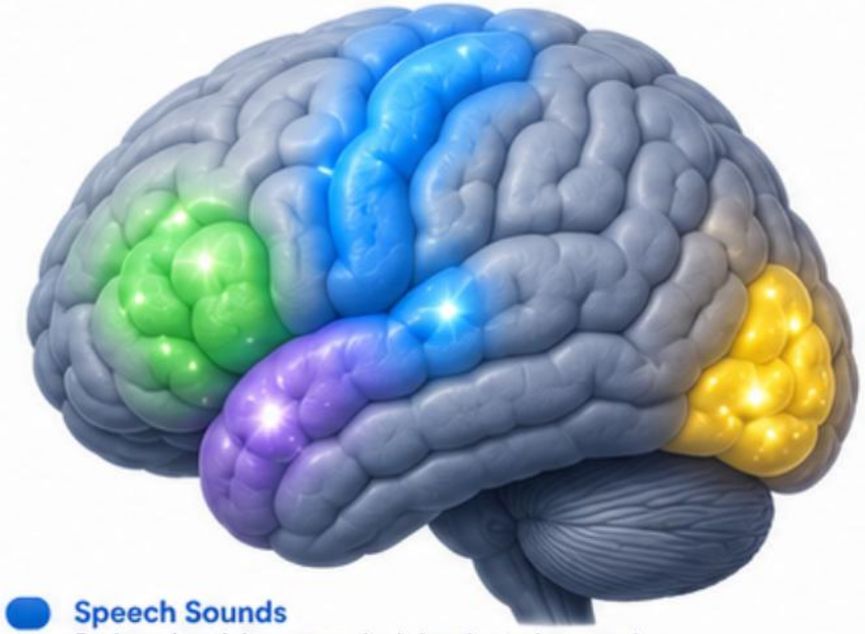
Language & Meaning
Strong activity helps understand the meaning of words and sentences.

Visual Processing
Strong activity helps recognize letters and word shapes.

Strong connections across these areas
help reading feel automatic and effortless.

3. Readers with Dyslexia

Reduced and less widespread activation in key reading areas.



Speech Sounds
Reduced activity can make it harder to hear and manipulate sounds in words.

Letters & Text
Reduced activity can make it harder to recognize letters and read words automatically.

Language & Meaning
Reduced activity can make understanding and connecting meaning more challenging.

Visual Processing
Reduced activity can make recognizing letters and word shapes less consistent.

These differences are not about intelligence.
With the right support, the brain can grow stronger connections.

OpenAI. (2026) *AI-generated brain illustrations.* [AI-generated image]. ChatGPT. https://chat.openai.com

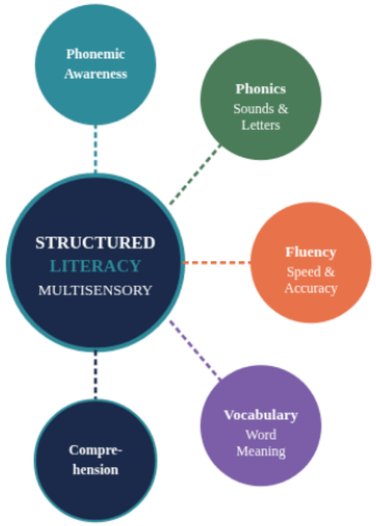
STRUCTURED LITERACY

What Is Structured Literacy?

"Explicit, systematic, cumulative reading instruction that teaches how language works."

- **Explicit** — Skills are directly taught, not inferred
- **Systematic** — Step-by-step with review & repetition
- **Multisensory** — See, hear, say, write, move
- **Cumulative** — Each skill builds on the last

Orton Gillingham (OG) is one well-known structured literacy approach



Structured Literacy builds the brain pathways that dyslexic students need to become more fluent.

SIGNS TO WATCH FOR

Signs Parents May Notice

Early identification leads to better outcomes.

Difficulty with Letter Sounds

Struggles to connect letters to their sounds (phonics)

May confuse b, d, p, q or other similar letters

Slow or Effortful Reading

Reading sounds choppy or takes far longer than peers

May lose place, skip lines, re-read often

Poor Spelling

Spells the same word differently each time; unusual errors

Phoenetic spelling that doesn't match rules

Avoiding Reading

Frustration, avoidance, or tears around reading tasks

May say "I hate reading" or feel stupid

Strong Ideas, Weak Written Work

Bright, verbal, and creative — but writing and spelling don't reflect their intelligence

Most telling sign: a gap between verbal expression versus written output

If you notice these signs, trust your instincts.
Early intervention and structured support can change your child's trajectory.

A MESSAGE OF HOPE

Your child can thrive.

"Children with dyslexia can thrive with the right instruction, encouragement, and support."

Right Instruction
Structured Literacy methods that work

Encouragement
Celebrate effort and every win

Support
Family, teachers, and specialists

Ready to take the next step?

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Multisensory Reading Center

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