Make connections

Students with dyslexia have difficulty with connecting between new and previous learning: the connections between concepts and the content of the material has to be made clear. This can be done using diagrams, mind maps or in a linear form.

Consolidate

This is extremely important for students with dyslexia. Reviewing, reflecting and consolidating (essentially, ‘over-learning’) needs to be done after each lesson.

Think about thinking

This is metacognition, which refers to how the learner uses their own learning skills when tackling questions. Helping the student access and develop thinking and learning skills can help him/her clarify concepts and ideas and help the learner express him/herself more clearly in written work.

Activate prior knowledge

This can help to develop comprehension. This can also help to identify any gaps in the student’s knowledge and any misunderstanding or uncertainty about the topic being studied.

Strategies for learning

Strategies such as visual imagery, self-questioning, mind maps and webbing are important for learning new material. Students with dyslexia need to be encouraged to use strategies, otherwise they may become too entrenched in the actual process of reading at the expense of the meaning and purpose of the activity.
Independence

It is important to encourage a student with dyslexia to become an independent learner. When the student is tackling new tasks, encourage self-questioning such as:

- Have I done this sort of thing before?
- How did I tackle it?
- What did I find easy/difficult?
- Why did I find it easy/difficult?
- What did I learn?
- What do I have to do to accomplish this task?
- How should I tackle it and should I tackle it the same way as before?

Sequence the sequence

Students with dyslexia may have some difficulty in retelling a story or giving information orally in the correct sequence. The student may need a framework such as: how did the story start, what happened after that, what was the main part/idea and how did it end?

Schema

Schemas can help the learner with dyslexia organise and categorise new information and can support comprehension and recall. It is important to identify their existing framework of knowledge (i.e. their own schema) of the topic being taught. This way you can ensure they are on the right track and what they still need to know.

Set achievable goals

Goals must be realistic, but at the same time they must be challenging. It is this balance between what is realistic and what is challenging that is the crucial factor. But whatever the goals, ensure that there is scaffolding and support in place.

Chunking

Place all similar pieces of information into one group. For example, if you are studying a new novel, make a chunk of all the facts relating to the context/environment. You should be able to chunk at least four items together to find items that have a strong connection.

Use visualisation

Remembering information is more effective when all the senses are used. Some students may need to be taught how to visualise, but it is a skill worth persevering with: it can help to strengthen the memory trace and is a good exercise in self-learning.
Active learning
This can help the learner with dyslexia retain and understand the new information more effectively. This activity could be in the form of discussion but it could also be in drama form and first person speech.

Discuss to understand
For many learners with dyslexia, discussion is the most effective means of retaining and understanding information. Discussion can make the information meaningful and can help the learner experiment with ideas and views. It is this experimentation that helps the learner extend their thinking and learning. For some, discussion can be like thinking aloud.

The role of pre-task discussion
Pre-task discussion can ensure that students have a good grasp of the concepts and background understanding to the topic. This can also help develop a schema and a plan to develop the topic.

Differentiate the task
For learners with dyslexia, differentiation can be through presentation, content and also outcome. You need to ensure the page, text or worksheet is well spaced out, not too crowded with text, that the vocabulary is accessible and that visuals are included. This provision can help with interpreting the task, as well as making it achievable.

Consider their challenges
Students with dyslexia can have a distinct pattern of difficulties and it is best to anticipate these. You can be fairly certain they will have challenges with remembering instructions, remembering sequences, remembering equipment, remembering rules and patterns, handling time pressures, working at too fast a pace and keeping on track. When planning work, try to consider these factors so you can make allowances and introduce some form of support.

Be positive
Although it is important to correct the student’s work, it is also important to identify the good points and help the student develop these. This means that you should avoid using a red marker to correct work. It is best to discuss the work with the student and get him or her to make any changes. It is important to be positive to ensure that high self-esteem and motivation are maintained.
Skimming

One of the issues with students with dyslexia is that they can take a great deal of time to read a piece of text. Some students are inclined to read every word and by doing this they may lose the gist of the text. It is a good idea to teach them to identify the relevant key words. Skim reading is useful for this and can provide the student with the big picture of a passage.

Pointers for presentation

How the materials are presented to students with dyslexia is crucial. If the font size is too small, they will be reluctant to read the text. Text needs to be broken into smaller sections and visuals should be used to break up the page. Icons can also be used to signify different types of tasks e.g. a reading task, comprehension task, discussion task.

Use technology

We are fortunate that most schools have invested in technology and the available software to help reading, writing, spelling, memory work and many other areas is rapidly increasing. The TextHelp® range is highly recommended and it has a spellchecker which has been specifically developed for use by students with dyslexia. You could also explore the Wheel of Apps developed by the CALL centre in Edinburgh - it contains links for apps for most topics and the electronic version is clickable, taking you through to the relevant app: www.callscotland.org.uk/downloads/posters-and-leaflets/ipad-apps-for-learners-with-dyslexia/