

Diagnostic Symptoms of Dysgraphia

(Writing Disorders)

Definition

Dysgraphia is a neurological disorder characterized by writing disabilities (Pierangelo and Giuliani, 2006). Specifically, the disorder causes a person's writing to be distorted or incorrect. In children, the disorder generally emerges when they are first introduced to writing. They make inappropriately sized and spaced letters, or write wrong or misspelled words, despite thorough instruction (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Strokes, 2006)

Diagnostic Symptoms

Diagnostic symptoms of dysgraphia include (International Dyslexia Association, 2005):

- Generally illegible writing (despite appropriate time and attention given the task)
- Inconsistencies: mixtures of print and cursive, upper and lowercase, or irregular sizes, shapes, or slant of letters
- Unfinished words or letters, omitted words
- Inconsistent position on page with respect to lines and margins.
- Inconsistent spaces between words and letters
- Cramped or unusual grip
- Holding the writing instrument very close to the paper
- Holding thumb over two fingers and writing from the wrist
- Strange wrist, body, or paper position
- Talking to self while writing, or carefully watching the hand that is writing
- Slow or labored copying or writing—even if it is neat and legible
- Content which does not reflect the student's other language skills
- combination of fine-motor difficulty, inability to re-visualize letters, and inability to remember the motor patterns

Further Key Points

Students' handwriting problems can arise from their lack of fine-motor coordination, failure to attend to task, inability to perceive and/or remember visual images accurately or inadequate handwriting instruction in the classroom (Friend & Bursuck, 2002; cited in Turnbull et al., 2004).

Many students struggle to produce neat, expressive written work, whether or not they have accompanying physical or cognitive difficulties. They may learn much less from an assignment because they must focus on writing mechanics instead of content. After spending more time on an assignment than their peers, these students understand the material less. Not surprisingly, belief in their ability to learn suffers. When the writing task is the primary barrier to learning or demonstrating knowledge, then accommodations, modifications, and remediation for these problems may be in order (Jones, n.d.; LDOnline, 2005).