

## How Various Learning and Attention Issues Can Cause Trouble With Reading

By Peg Rosen  
At a Glance

- A number of learning and attention issues can cause reading problems.

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- These issues can affect the mechanics of reading as well as comprehension.

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- Different kinds of learning issues often require different strategies to help with reading.

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There are many reasons why kids might have trouble with reading. One of the most common is dyslexia. But other challenges can also affect how kids process written language.

Find out how different learning and attention issues can impact reading. And discover strategies that can help.

### How Dyslexia Can Affect Reading

**What it is:** A lifelong condition that creates difficulty with reading and with processing language. It's the most common learning issue.

**The reading connection:** Kids with dyslexia struggle with decoding. They have trouble connecting letter symbols to the sounds those symbols make. And that makes it hard for them to read fluently and accurately. It can also impact reading comprehension. (See a detailed list of signs of dyslexia.)

**Specific difficulties:** Kids with dyslexia often have trouble with early language skills. They may not be able to recognize the individual sounds in words (phonemic awareness), for instance. They may also struggle with reading comprehension and have problems answering questions about what they've read. Dyslexia can also impact spelling, writing and math.

**Strategies to try:** Find tips to help your child recognize sight words. Help your child connect letters to sounds in everyday activities. Discover ways to improve your child's reading comprehension.

### How ADHD Can Affect Reading

**What it is:** An issue with brain structure and chemistry that makes it hard to pay attention. Kids with ADHD have trouble with [executive function](#). In addition to attention, they often struggle with key skills like working memory, flexible thinking and self-control. Many are also hyperactive.

**The reading connection:** Trouble with working memory makes it hard for kids to remember the rules of reading. Trouble with self-control and focus can impact how well they understand what they've read. Learn more about how executive functioning issues impact reading.

**Specific difficulties:** Kids may have trouble recalling what they read earlier in the text and connecting it to what they're reading now. They may also rush to get done faster, miss key details and not take the time to think about what they've read. And frustration may make them give up on a reading task.

**Strategies to try:** Come up with tricks for remembering reading rules, such as a formula or rhyme. Use a chart to help your child track "who, what, when, where, and why." Have your child explain in his own words what he's read. Add some action—act out scenes and read aloud. And encourage activity breaks.

## How Nonverbal Learning Disabilities (NVLD) Can Affect Reading

**What it is:** A lifelong learning issue that affects social skills, abstract thinking and grasp of spatial relationships. Kids with NVLD often have strong language skills, but have trouble sorting through information and understanding bigger concepts.

**The reading connection:** Many kids with NVLD have problems with reading comprehension. They struggle to find the "larger message" in what they read.

**Specific difficulties:** Kids tend to take what they read too literally. They have trouble grasping humor, emotion, themes and symbolism. They may not enjoy fiction because it "isn't true." NVLD can also make it hard for kids to understand what motivates characters.

**Strategies to try:** Discuss characters and themes before your child starts reading. Ask open-ended questions about text, like how characters might feel or why something happened. And don't give up on fiction. Try to find novels that match your child's interests.

## How Slow Processing Speed Can Affect Reading

**What it is:** An issue that causes kids to take a long time to process and respond to information. It's not a specific learning or attention issue. But it can contribute to issues like ADHD and dyslexia. Slow processing speed can also impact executive functioning skills.

**The reading connection:** Kids need extensive time to decode words, apply reading rules and make sense of text. That can make reading tasks long and frustrating.

**Specific difficulties:** Kids may miss the meaning of phrases and sentences because decoding takes so much time. They may have trouble making sense of stories because they're so bogged down in the text.

**Strategies to try:** Make sure your child is given the extra time he needs to read texts through his IEP or 504 plan. Practice sight words to help make reading more automatic. Set realistic goals and give your child incentives to improve reading speed.

There are many things you can do at home to help and encourage your child to read. Discover more strategies for building reading skills.

Find out what to do if you think your child might have dyslexia, ADHD or other learning and attention issues. These may include visual processing issues, which can cause kids to struggle with letter reversals. You may want to consider having your child evaluated. That can show what's at the root of his reading issues and help you find the best ways to help your child.

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## Key Takeaways

- **Dyslexia is a common learning issue that causes trouble with reading.**
  - **Trouble with attention and working memory can also make it hard to build reading skills.**
  - **A full evaluation will help reveal what's at the root of your child's reading challenges.**
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## About the Author



**Peg Rosen** writes for digital and print, including *ParentCenter*, *WebMD*, *Parents*, *Good Housekeeping* and *Martha Stewart*.

## Reviewed by



**Margie Gillis, Ed.D.**, is the founder and president of Literacy How, which provides professional development for teachers on research-based reading practices in the classroom.

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