

DYSLEXIA AND ME: What is dyslexia?

‘You have Dyslexia - does that mean you can’t read?’ ‘Do you think you should be working in a high-pressure environment if you have a disability?’

[The NHS](#) defines dyslexia this way: is a common learning difficulty that can cause problems with reading, writing and spelling. It's a specific learning difficulty, which means it causes problems with certain abilities used for learning, such as reading and writing.

What it does NOT mean, however, is that people living with dyslexia are stupid or poor performers. And please hold off on remarks over our spelling.

Over the years I’ve heard people make some offensive statements when I tell them that I’m dyslexic. Yes, my spelling is poor, my phonetic decoding skills may not be great, and I have trouble reading certain words. But many still fail to understand what it actually means.

So how does dyslexia affect someone?

I realised I had dyslexic-type symptoms when I was about 12. I was regularly confusing Bs and Ds and knew that my reading wasn’t at the same level as my peers. I was still a B-average student but always felt like something didn’t quite connect.

I had to work extremely hard to pass any language-based subjects, yet maths, science, art, drama, craft & design, sports all come really naturally to me. I had a learning support test at school, an official dyslexia assessment at University and then a full adult assessment in 2008.

Dyslexia doesn’t affect that much on a day-to-day basis. I do have to keep detailed notes as my memory isn’t the best, I use a spell checker on my laptop and phone, and I think in pictures.

Perceptions in society

I think a lot of people in society view dyslexics as stupid and incapable, which is a very dated perception. Times have changed, and many well-known dyslexics are coming out to talk about how they have excelled not despite their dyslexia but because of it.

The reality is there is a negative stigma that has been ingrained into society about dyslexia – it’s dated, hurtful and holding back some very capable dyslexics in shining and reaching their full potential. It’s not as prevalent as back in the 80s and 90s but I still come across backward views about this way of thinking.

Although I was supported and encouraged through my tertiary education, I have come across people in industry who come out with some ‘interesting’ and slightly odd comments about dyslexia.

Focussing on the positives

I know many dyslexics who even today are hiding away from telling people that they are dyslexic. I until recently was one of them but it takes confidence, strength and support to speak up about being dyslexia and I encourage more people to do so.

Until we start openly discussing these issues, people will continue to mistreat and judge. I have seen professional high fliers, including Directors, business owners and skilled engineers break down the minute they start talking about their dyslexia, as the trauma and pain from their younger years is always there in the background.

Thankfully the education system is changing. With time, those with dyslexia will not have to go through the same pain.

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In this blog series Mamta explores dyslexia and how it's affected her life and career.