


Autism and Literacy

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∞
Speech Language Learning Connection,
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∞
2026 NJSHA Convention
04/16/2026

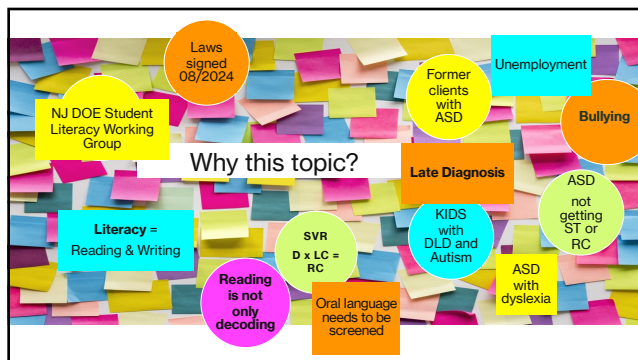


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Disclosure –
In accordance with ASHA
requirements for Transparency and
Disclosure, I am **required to disclose**
that I have NO financial or non-
financial relationships related to this
presentation.

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Why this topic?



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AGENDA

- x SLPs and Literacy/SLPs and Autism
- x Autism Classification
- x What is Literacy/What is Reading?
- x New Dyslexia Definition
- x NJ Dyslexia and Literacy Laws
- x What is unique about Autism and Literacy?
- x "What to assess?" and "What can we do?" are integrated into the presentation.
- x References/Resources are part of the presentation and in the handout.

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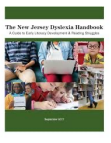
SLPS AND LITERACY

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<p>ASHA Roles and Responsibilities of SLPs with Respect to Reading and Writing in Children and Adolescents</p>	<p>Position Statement</p> <p>Key aspects of the SLP's role in literacy include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prevention and Identification: Identifying children at risk for literacy difficulties and implementing early intervention strategies to prevent later reading failures. • Assessment and Intervention: Evaluating reading and writing skills, focusing on phonological awareness, decoding, reading fluency, and comprehension. • Collaboration: Working with teachers, special educators, and parents to support classroom curriculum and integrate literacy into therapeutic sessions. • Emergent Literacy: Helping young children develop foundational skills such as print awareness, letter-sound knowledge, and oral language skills. • Health Literacy: Beyond school-aged children, SLPs help individuals understand and use health information effectively.
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**NJ
Dyslexia
Handbook**



Taken from the NJ Dyslexia Handbook

Speech-language pathologists/specialists **play an important role in the development of literacy skills of students due to the connection between spoken and written language.**

Students with reading and writing skill deficits **may present with a history of speech and language delay, and exhibit ongoing difficulty with using language strategically to communicate, think and learn.**

SLPs/SLSs: **have the skills to diagnose oral and written language disorders across different age and grade levels, and to intervene at the level of need.**

Their **collaboration** with teachers, administrators, and CST members can be essential to **early identification** and to **fostering literacy acquisition in general education settings** where students are at risk or experiencing reading and writing disorders.

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**NJSHA
Literacy
Committee**

- We typically meet once/month.
- We have over 100 members.
- We are a passionate group!
- We discuss many topics related to literacy.
- We are in the process of completing a "Parent Project"
- Look out for an upcoming survey from our committee.
- You can come to learn – you do not need to be an "expert."
- Contact the NJSHA office to become a member info@njsha.org

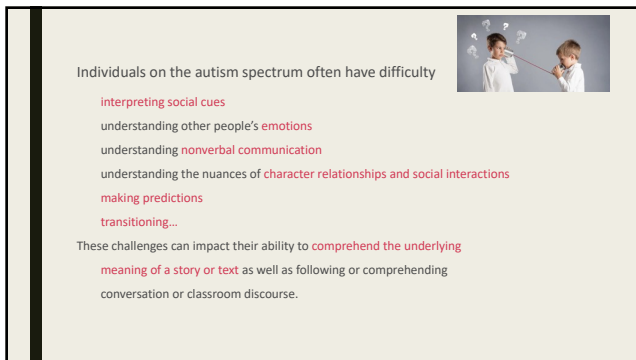
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SLPS HAVE AN
IMPORTANT ROLE

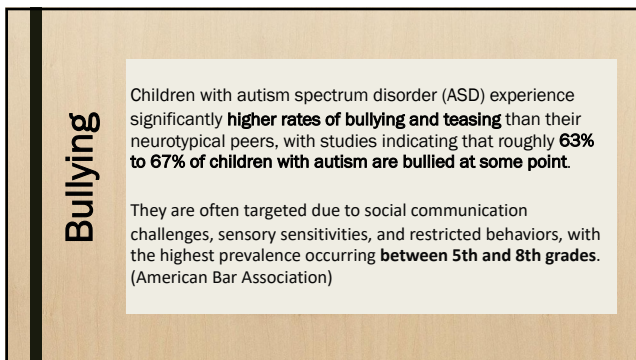
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Being in a general education classroom

Attending a public school or a school with a general education population

High level of Autistic traits

Zablotsky B, Bradshaw CP, Anderson CM, Law P. (2014). **Risk factors for bullying among children with autism spectrum disorders.** *Autism*, 18(4), 419-27.

Social difficulties and external symptoms

Victimization

and specific behavioral characteristics significantly increase the risk of being a victim, bully, or both.

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Social Media

Adults with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) are at risk for significant social and emotional difficulties yet show **strengths and interests in screen-based technology**. The purpose of this study was to examine patterns and social-emotional correlates of social media use in a sample of 108 adults with ASD. Participants completed self-report measures of social media use, friendship quality and quantity, and loneliness. **The results indicated that the majority of participants (79.6%) used social networking sites (SNS), and that the most commonly cited reason for using SNS was social connection. Adults with ASD who used SNS were more likely to have close friends, and those who used SNS for social engagement reported closer friendship relationships.** However, greater offline friendship quality and quantity, not social media use, were associated with decreased loneliness in the current sample.

Mazurek, M.O. (2013) Social media use among adults with autism spectrum disorders. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 1709-1714.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.02.004>

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Social media offers ASD individuals opportunities for connection and interest-based community, but poses **significant risks**, including

- Higher susceptibility to cyberbullying,
- Social manipulation, and
- Scams due to literal interpretation of content.
- Challenges in understanding social cues can lead to online conflict and emotional distress.

Leung PWS, Li SX, Holroyd EA, Tsang CSQ, Wong WCV. Online social media poses opportunities and risks in autistic youth: implications for services from a qualitative study. *Front Psychiatry*. 2023 Jun 30;14:959846.

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VICTIMIZATION




Autism Innocence Project
Supporting Autism Criminal Justice Reform

Multiple studies indicate
44% of autistic children have experienced being victimized.
(Copenhagen & Tewksbury, 2019)

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Criminal Justice System

The vast majority of autistic people are law-abiding citizens who are more likely to be **victims** of crimes than commit crimes, but they are still **seven times more likely** to intersect with the criminal justice system than individuals without autism (Berryessa, 2014)



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Autism Employment Stats

1/3 of autistics attempt to go to college	Of the 1/3, 20% graduate in 5 years.	According to the Dept of Labor (2023), 85% of college graduates with Autism were unemployed.
16% of Autistic adults work full-time	Unemployment or underemployment rates are estimated between 40% and 85%	https://autismsociety.org/employment/ advancedautism.com

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About 75% of autistic adults are unemployed,

87% remain living with their parents, and autistic college students graduate at dramatically lower rates than their peers.

The suicide rate among people with autism is nine times that of the general population,

and many autistic adults still cannot access even the most basic health care.

NJcom. March 29th, 2026.

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Psychology Today

Treatment Centers and Programs

Failure to launch is a thing!

"Failure to Launch": Shaping Intervention for Highly Dependent Adult Children
Eli R. Lebowitz

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Example of information card to have your child with disabilities carry:

My Name is _____

I am _____

I wish to remain silent and do not waive my Miranda Rights.

I want my attorney to be present before any interrogation.

Please contact:

Parent's name and telephone number _____

Attorney's name and telephone number _____

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What is Reading?

Let's look at a Simple View (of Reading)

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The Simple View of Reading SVR

Gough & Tunmer (1986)

- $LC \times D = RC$
- LC = Language/Listening Comprehension
- D = Decoding/Word Recognition
- RC = Reading Comprehension

Supported by scientific research

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Scarborough's Reading Rope

Language Comprehension (C)

- Background Knowledge: facts, concepts, etc.
- Vocabulary: breadth, precision, links, etc.
- Language Structures: syntax, semantics, etc.
- Verbal Reasoning: inference, metaphor, etc.
- Literacy Knowledge: print concepts, genres, etc.

Word Recognition (D)

- Phonological Awareness: syllables, phonemes, etc.
- Decoding: alphabetic principle, letter-sound correspondences
- Sight Recognition: of familiar words

Skilled Reading (RC)

INCREASINGLY STRATEGIC

INCREASINGLY AUTOMATIC

$LC \times D = RC$ Fluent word recognition and comprehension.

This interpretation of the Reading Rope incorporates Gough & Tunmer's (1986) Simple View of Reading.

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Phonological Awareness

- A broad skill that includes identifying and manipulating units of oral language parts, such as words, syllables, onsets and rimes.
- Phonemic awareness: identify & manipulate individual sounds (phonemes) in spoken words.
- Phonemic awareness is one of the best predictors.
- Phonics: phoneme-grapheme learning/Alphabetic Principle

Word Recognition
Needs to be taught

Decoding and Spelling (Encoding)

- Decoding: Matching a letter or combination of letters (graphemes) to their sounds (phonemes) and recognizing the patterns that make syllables and words.
- Encoding: Matching a sound to a letter or combination of letters (graphemes) to write words


Sight Recognition

- Sight words: words that cannot be phonemically decoded, must be recognized by sight

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DECODING (Word Recognition)

- WHAT IS IT?
- WHAT SKILLS DOES A STUDENT NEED TO BE ABLE TO DECODE TEXT, ESPECIALLY UNFAMILIAR TEXT?
- ARE THERE OTHER COGNITIVE OR LANGUAGE PROCESSES THAT PLAY A ROLE IN DECODING?
- BASED ON THE SVR, HOW DOES POOR DECODING IMPACT READING?



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Let's Practice!

q = (d) or (t)	-ys combination (er)
z = (m)	a = (e)
p = (b)	e = (ah)
h = (p)	

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How did you feel???



What did you need to know or recall?

Did you use strategies?

Did your knowledge of vocabulary help?

Context?

Inferencing?

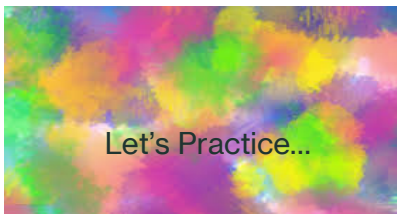



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Language Comprehension
hard-wired

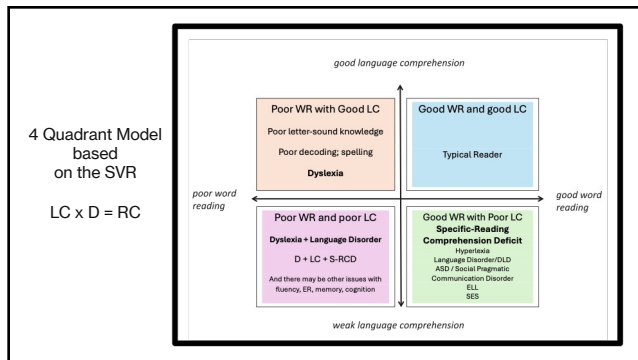
- **Background Knowledge**
 - What the student/reader already knows about a topic
 - A consideration for ELL Literacy Standards (*activating prior knowledge*)
- **Vocabulary**
 - Highly correlated with Verbal IQ
 - Highly correlated with Listening and Reading Comprehension
 - Plays an important role in word reading.
- **Language Structures**
 - Phonology, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Discourse, Pragmatics
- **Verbal Reasoning**
 - The ability to gather, analyze, think about, and evaluate language for understanding (inferencing, critical thinking, etc.)
- **Literacy Knowledge**
 - Print awareness/concepts, left to right
 - Letters, words, sentences in print
 - Title, author, illustrations, types of print

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Let's Practice...

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Reading Disability Sub-types

Dyslexia is the most common type of reading disability (RD) (reported estimates between 15 to 20 percent of the population or "1 in 5").

Another 10-15 percent of poor readers appear to be accurate but **too slow** in word recognition and text reading (**Fluency/Processing Speed**).

Specific-Reading Comprehension Deficit (S-RCD) is estimated to include 10 – 15 percent of school-age children (Cutting, 2013; Landi & Ryherd, 2018; Moats & Tolman, 2009, Aaron et al., 1999; Cain and Oakhill, 2006, 2011; Catts et al., 2003; Leach et al., 2003; Nation, 2001).

What about the overlap?

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Who are our students with decoding or word recognition weaknesses?

Children with decoding or word recognition weaknesses struggle to match letters to sounds, making it difficult to "sound out" new words or recognize familiar ones automatically. Often experiencing reading, spelling, and fluency issues, these children may exhibit slow, labored reading, frequent word guessing, and poor reading comprehension.

Dyslexia:

- phonological
- rapid naming (slow readers)

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Who are our students
with
**Language
Comprehension
weaknesses?**

**S-RCD
(Cutting, Moats)**

- Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)
- Social-Pragmatic Communication Disorder
- Higher-level language weaknesses (inferencing)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- "Hyperlexia"
- English language learners (ELLs) who are acquiring English as a second language while participating in content instruction delivered in English.
- Other children may not have a true "disorder" of language but may be delayed in **vocabulary knowledge, background knowledge, etc.** due to socio-economic factors.

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Moats
2009

Landi

S-RCD is a **Comprehension or Language deficit**, specifically found in children with social-linguistic disabilities (e.g., autism spectrum), vocabulary weaknesses, generalized language learning disorders, and learning difficulties that affect abstract reasoning and logical thinking."

"These subskills include semantic and grammatical processing, inference making, and other higher-level language skills such as comprehension monitoring. This disorder also appears to have a neurobiological basis..."


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Hiding in Plain Sight:

Text Comprehension, Hyperlexia, and Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorder (2019)
By Shari Robertson

Comprehension problems for readers with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are often overlooked during the period when most children are learning to read, masked by strong early decoding skills, a good memory for specific facts, and an understanding of concrete content.

As students progress through the grades, the content of what they must read to be successful becomes increasingly complex and the comprehension deficit, present but unrecognized from the earliest interactions with text, is revealed.



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Table 2. Comparison of characteristics of readers with good comprehension and those with hyperlexia.

Readers with good comprehension	Readers with hyperlexia
Read with purpose. Monitor their own comprehension. Consider alternate word meanings. Use a variety of strategies to identify unknown word meanings to expand vocabulary. Understand nonliteral/figurative language. Draw on a broad base of personal knowledge and experiences to enhance comprehension. Look for organizational scheme or impose their own to increase understanding. Infer what is not explicitly stated.	Only decode words; do not look for purpose. Do not self-monitor comprehension. Inflexible, concrete vocabulary. Do not use strategies to expand vocabulary. Typically only understand/consider literal meanings of words/phrases. General knowledge base and personal lexicon are narrow and restricted. Do not consider organizational structure of a text. Do not consider subtle meanings; cannot "read between the lines."

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Text

The Purpose for Reading This Selection

- Read for pleasure
- Read to learn new vocabulary
- Read to be able to discuss with others
- Read to learn a procedure
- Read to find answers
- Read for specific information
- Read to compare and contrast
- Read and reflect
- Read and summarize
- Other _____

The Author's Purpose for Writing this Selection


- Tell a Story
- Compare and Contrast
- Convince an audience
- Convey information
- Entertain
- Report and inform
- Share an experience
- Other _____

Figure 2. Factors to consider during informal assessment of passage or story recall.

PASSAGE/STORY RETELL
✓ Paraphrasing of facts or paraphrasing?
✓ Random bits of information or story grammar?
✓ Consideration of the needs of the listener/presupposition?
✓ Use of appropriate pronouns/anaphoric referencing?
✓ Middle of ideas or main idea?
✓ Inclusion of bizarre/unrelated facts or references?
✓ Able to answer clarifying questions/expand on topic?

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These children are frequently referred to as:




“poor comprehenders”
or
“word readers”
or
“word callers”




They may be classified as SLD in Reading Comprehension

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Specific-Reading Comprehension Deficit (10-15% of school age children)



(Aaron et al., 1999; Cain and Oakhill, 2006, 2011; Catts et al., 2003; Leach et al., 2003; Nation, 2001).

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Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)
Important Information for Educators

What is Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)?
DLD is a neurobiological disorder that affects the ability to acquire and use language. It is not caused by hearing loss, intellectual disability, or environmental factors.

DLD can co-occur with other disorders, such as dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.

Why is DLD important for educators to know?
DLD is a common disorder that affects a significant number of children. It is often undiagnosed and can have a significant impact on a child's academic and social development. Educators should be aware of the signs and symptoms of DLD and be able to identify children who may have the disorder. This information can help educators provide appropriate support and interventions for these children.

How common is DLD?
DLD affects approximately 7% of children worldwide.

What should I do if I suspect that my child has DLD?
If you suspect that your child has DLD, you should contact your local educational agency (LEA) for an evaluation. The LEA should conduct a comprehensive evaluation to determine if your child has DLD and to develop an individualized education program (IEP) for your child.

What are the signs and symptoms of DLD?
The signs and symptoms of DLD vary depending on the child's age and the severity of the disorder. Some common signs and symptoms include: difficulty understanding and using language, difficulty following directions, difficulty with grammar and syntax, and difficulty with reading and writing.

What are the risk factors for DLD?
The risk factors for DLD include: family history of language disorders, hearing loss, intellectual disability, and environmental factors.

What are the interventions for DLD?
The interventions for DLD include: speech and language therapy, educational accommodations, and social skills training.

What are the long-term outcomes for children with DLD?
The long-term outcomes for children with DLD vary depending on the severity of the disorder and the quality of the interventions. Children with DLD may experience difficulties with reading and writing, and may have a higher risk of academic and social difficulties.

References:
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2016). *Developmental Language Disorder (DLD): A Position Statement*.
Catts, P. W., & Adger, D. W. (2008). *Developmental Language Disorder: A Review of the Literature*.
Nation, K., & Bishop, D. V. (2006). *Developmental Language Disorder: A Review of the Literature*.

DLD References

Raising Awareness of Developmental Language Disorder

DLD and Me

The DLD Project

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Cheat Sheet for Parents

Phoneme: The smallest unit of speech sound in a word. The word 'shark' has three phonemes (sh) (ar) (k).

Grapheme: The letter/s that spell the sounds in words. The word 'shark' has three graphemes: sh, ar, k. The word 'dog' has three graphemes: d, o, g.

Phonology: The study of the sound structure in language.

Phonics: A method of teaching people to read by matching sounds (phonemes) with symbols (letters). Phonics has the strongest evidence base there is when it comes to teaching reading and spelling.

Morpheme: The smallest unit of meaning in a word. Eg. 'sharks' has 2 morphemes: shark + s. The base word is 'shark' and the suffix 's' indicates plurality.

Morphology is the study of meaningful word parts

Sounding Out (decoding): Saying the phonemes (sounds) out loud to get to an accurate pronunciation (and recognition) of an unknown word.

Blending: Saying the sounds quickly, or stretching the sounds to hear the word.

Segmenting: Hearing a word and breaking it into its separate phonemes (sounds) to spell it.

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Dyslexia/Decoding

Early Assessment



Contemporary Pediatrics News|Articles|

April 2, 2026

Kindergarten cognitive deficits linked to dyslexia risk

Author(s) [Celeste Krewson, Assistant Editor](#)

Key Takeaways

•Cognitive-linguistic deficits in kindergarten—especially in phonological awareness and letter knowledge—strongly predict early-emerging dyslexia by first grade.

•Specific kindergarten deficits, particularly in letter knowledge, rapid automatized naming, and morphological awareness, remain significant risk factors for late-emerging dyslexia in fourth grade.

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Westerveld M. F., Paynter J. (2021). Investigating the effectiveness of parent-implemented shared book reading intervention for preschoolers with ASD. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 37(2), 149–162.



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What about students who are nonverbal or who present with severe language/cognitive challenges?

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Reading and Low IQ (Down Syndrome)

Studies collectively underscore the **benefits of phonics-based and decoding-focused interventions** for children with Down syndrome. However, **more time will be needed to teach decoding** secondary to intellectual disability (ID).


Research demonstrates that with an integrated and systematic approach, students with ID can successfully combine the separate skills of **phonemic awareness and letter-sound correspondence to decode unfamiliar words** (Allor et al, 2010; Browder et al, 2008; O'Connor et al, 2010).

Results of a randomized long term study which lasted for 4 years found that students with low IQs, including students with mild to moderate ID **can learn basic reading skills when provided appropriate, comprehensive reading instruction for an extended period of time** (Allor et al, 2014), (Connor, 2006)

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1. Spend lots of time reading to the child. 
2. Give the child opportunities to interact nonverbally.

Run your finger just under the text as you read, then ask your child do the pointing or engage in HOH scanning.

Ask your child to turn the pages at the right time (Sing-song "Turn the page.")
3. Provide story props so the child can act out the story as it unfolds. Take turns imitating what the characters are doing or sounds made (Boo!, Owl!, Woof!)
3. Use stories with repetitive text (Brown Bear, Brown Bear).
4. Use AAC and speech-generating devices.
5. Make picture social stories. 
6. Add words to visual schedules
7. These students will need more repetitions (more time).

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Other Resources

Light, J. & McNaughton, D. (2017) Improving Literacy Outcomes for Individuals with Autism and Limited Speech (video)

<https://aac-learning-center.psu.edu/2017/09/30/improving-literacy-outcomes-for-individuals-with-asd/>

<https://www.autismspeaks.org/expert-opinion/five-tips-teaching-nonverbal-children-read>

Accessible Literacy for Emerging Communicators: A Proposed Model and Case Application with Children on the Autism Spectrum (2025)

DeLuca, T., Bouchey, A., Wolfliet, C.
ASHA Perspectives, SIG 12 Clinical Focus

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The Use of Pictorial or Graphic Representation in Reading Comprehension Interventions for Students with ASD: A Meta-Analysis (2025)

Lee, S., Quinn, S., Jiang, Y.
Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders

Results of findings from 5 studies indicate that interventions utilizing PGR significantly improve RC in children with ASD.

All interventions included a tech-based component with 3 also incorporating a paper-based component. Integrating multiple modalities (paper and tech-based) yielded additive results – with paper-based yielding more stable and consistent benefits.

Two studies examined Readers Theater activities, including story mapping and video self-modeling. The other 3 studies evaluated specific technologies: **My Pictures Talk** app that allows users to create customized social narratives with personal pictures; **TinyTap**, an educational platform with a variety of learning activities; and a **SMART Notebook** application for creating story maps and labels.

Story maps (for scaffolding and to reduce cognitive load); graphic organizers, narrative elements, Tiny Tap good for inferencing, video self-monitoring, video prompting through the process of reading and completing graphic organizers; multiple photos

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Visual Supports and Autism Spectrum Disorders
autismspeaks.org

What are visual supports?
Visual supports are any visual aids that help people with autism understand and navigate their world. They can be used to teach new skills, provide structure, and reduce anxiety.

How do visual supports help?
Visual supports help by providing a visual representation of information that is often abstract or hard to understand. They can be used to teach new skills, provide structure, and reduce anxiety.

Types of visual supports
Visual supports can be used in many ways, including:
- Schedules and checklists
- Social stories and scripts
- Task cards and instructions
- Visual aids and labels
- Visual schedules and timelines

Resources for using visual supports
There are many resources available for using visual supports, including:
- Books and articles
- Websites and online resources
- Videos and webinars
- Workshops and training courses

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What is Dysgraphia?

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Dysgraphia is a neurological learning disability affecting handwriting and written expression, causing difficulties with letter formation, spacing, and writing speed.

Symptoms include **poor handwriting, spelling errors, and writing fatigue**, often arising from issues with **fine motor skills, visual-spatial processing, or language**.

It is diagnosed via educational assessments, often requiring individualized education programs (IEPs) for support as SLD in Written Expression.

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2025
DYSLEXIA DEFINITION

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2025 Dyslexia Definition

Replaces the 2002 definition

<https://ga.dyslexiaida.org/ida-2025-definition-of-dyslexia/>

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2025 Dyslexia Definition


- 1 Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in
- 2 word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and
- 3 vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along a
- 4 continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective
- 5 for the individual's peers. The causes of dyslexia are complex and
- 6 involve combinations of genetic, neurobiological, and environmental
- 7 influences that interact throughout development. Underlying difficulties

with phonological and morphological processing are common but not universal, and early oral language weaknesses often foreshadow literacy challenges. Secondary consequences include reading comprehension problems and reduced reading and writing experience that can impede growth in language, knowledge, written expression, and overall academic achievement. Psychological well-being and employment opportunities also may be affected. Although identification and targeted instruction are important at any age, language and literacy support before and during the early years of education is particularly effective.

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NJ LITERACY LAWS

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Let's Review the 2013 Dyslexia Laws

PL 2013 c. 105 Professional Development
http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2012/Bills/PL13/105_PDF

PL 2013 c. 131 Dyslexia Definition
http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2012/Bills/PL13/131_PDF

PL 2013 c. 210 Dyslexia/Reading Screener
http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2012/Bills/PL13/210_PDF

NJ Dyslexia Handbook (2017, 2024)
<https://www.state.nj.us/education/specialed/dyslexia/NJDyslexiaHandbook.pdf>

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NJ Literacy Laws (signed Aug/2024)

The **Learning Equity and Academic Recovery (LEAR)** legislation, codified by N.J.S.A. 18A:6-142 through 150, requires that **each school district**, including **Approved Private Schools for Students with Disabilities** (APPSDs), conduct, **at least twice annually**, a **literacy screening of every student enrolled in kindergarten through grade three** to determine reading proficiency, and **provide professional development on best practices in literacy instruction** to educators and administrators serving **preschool through grade six**. This includes classroom teachers, library media specialists, reading and early literacy specialists, **speech-language specialists**, and educators who support multilingual learners and students with disabilities. All professional learning associated with the LEAR legislation is expected to be completed by June 2026.

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Positives

- X Screenings are mandatory.
- X ALL students, K-3
- X Parents need to be notified of screening results within 30 days
- X Guidelines for choosing a screener
- X Establishment of LEAR - professional development - great trainings
- X SLSs included as group to benefit from trainings
- X Data collection

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Problems



- X The focus is on reading at the **decoding** level, not on "language" or comprehension
- X Literacy - but no screening of **writing**
- X Screenings were initially recommended for **3x/year** (not two)
- X What about students in **preschool or 4th grade** and higher (reading to learn?)
- X Problems with some of the **screeners** schools are using
- X IMHO - the NJ MTSS model is flawed. Schools are still using it as a means to **delay** CST testing.



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The [Working Group on Student Literacy Recommendations Report](#) was released on March 19, 2025.

Further guidance was provided in May 2025 through [The New Jersey Literacy Framework: A Guide to Evidence-Based Literacy Practices & Universal Screeners](#).



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THE UNIQUENESS OF AUTISM

WHAT ARE SOME FEATURES OF AUTISM THAT CAN IMPACT A STUDENT'S ABILITY TO BECOME A SUCCESSFUL READER?

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Language Development Issues:

- Challenges with receptive language (LC)
- Vocabulary (especially reasoning tasks)
- Complex syntax



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Syntax

Reduced Comprehension of Complex Structures:
such as passive sentences ("The boy was chased by the dog") or relative clauses (e.g., "The boy that the girl chased"), which are frequently harder to parse than simple active voice.

Literal Interpretation:
Complex sentences require an understanding of context and inferencing

Working Memory Strain:
Processing complex syntax that requires higher working memory capacity to hold and manipulate multiple pieces of information simultaneously.

Anaphora and Pronoun Confusion:
Identifying the correct referent for pronouns in complex sentences, particularly in ambiguous contexts.

(Durleman, et. al., 2015)

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Sentence Combining

Possible Sequence (Saddler, 2018) With Examples of Sentence Combining Exercises

Inserting adjectives and adverbs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original sentence 1: Robert (adjective) King (adverb) worked to change the law. • Original sentence 2: The law was unfair. • Possible combined sentence: Robert (adjective) King (adverb) worked to change the unfair law.
Producing compound subjects and objects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original sentence 1: Dr. King wanted equality. • Original sentence 2: Dr. King wanted justice. • Combined sentence: Dr. King wanted equality and justice.
Producing compound subjects and objects with coordinating conjunctions (e.g., and, but)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original sentence 1: Dr. King believed that promises should remain unbroken. • Original sentence 2: Dr. King believed that promises should remain unbroken. (repeated) • Combined sentence: Dr. King believed that promises should remain unbroken and unbroken.
Producing possessive nouns
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original sentence 1: Dr. King had books. • Original sentence 2: The books were by Malcolm X. • Combined sentence: Dr. King had Malcolm X's books.
Producing sentences with adverbial clauses using connecting words (e.g., because, after, until, when)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original sentence 1: Dr. King was arrested. • Original sentence 2: Dr. King had arrested (repeated) • Combined sentence: Martin was arrested because he had a speech.
Producing sentences with relative clauses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original sentence 1: Dr. King was a great speaker. • Original sentence 2: Dr. King (repeated) spoke (repeated) with his words. • Combined sentence: Dr. King was a great speaker who repeated many points with his words.
Inserting appositives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Original sentence 1: Dr. King led the civil rights movement. • Original sentence 2: Dr. King was a bold activist. • Combined sentence: Dr. King, a bold activist, led the civil rights movement.

Intensive Intervention Practice Guide: Explicit Instruction in Sentence Combining for Struggling Writers (includes hierarchy) <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED614nr9676.pdf>

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Fun Fact

What is the most covered song in music history by the Beatles?



The Beatles are a British rock group. They released 213 to 235 songs as a group. This was between 1962 and 1970. _____ was written in 1965. It was the most covered song in music history. It was recorded over 2200 times.

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Inference and Perspective

Challenges with Inference and Perspective (Theory of Mind): Students may struggle to understand why characters in stories act a certain way, grasp non-literal language (idioms, sarcasm), or infer meaning that is not explicitly stated.



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Activities



- Teach how to identify sarcasm, prosody (Nash, 2016)
- Practice sarcasm.
- Teach heteronyms: Words spelled identically but pronounced differently with distinct and different meanings: *lead* (to guide) and *lead* (metal), *tear*, *close*, *desert*, *produce*, and *row* (Shari Robertson)
- Teach the meaning behind idioms.
- Identify sarcasm/idioms in reading material.
- Inferencing (Westby references)
- <https://hollistonspeech.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/inferences.pdf>
- Inference graphic organizers <https://www.readingrockets.org/sites/default/files/migrated/InferenceGraphicOrganizers.pdf>
- Look up Shari Robertson (SLP) for free PowerPoints on RC in autism and list of heteronyms.

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alternate	attribute	bass	bow
buffet	conduct	conflict	console
content	contest	contract	convert
converse	deliberate	digest	does
dove	drawer	house	intern
invalid	laminated	lather	lead
minute	moderate	mow	number
object	perfect	permit	present
produce	project	read	refuse
reside	resign	resume	rebel
row	separate	sewer	sow
secreted	subject	tear	wind
wound			



Shari Robertson
2020

69

The real reason dinosaurs became extinct

Check out Westby & Reading Rockets References on Inferencing In Reference Handout

Category	Literal Any information stated in the text	Inferential Make an educated guess
What is the main idea of the passage?		
What is the main character of the story?		
What is the main problem in the story?		

Think More:
 What's the best?
 Why do you make that prediction?

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central coherence

Weak central coherence: A tendency to focus on fine details rather than the "big picture" can hinder a student's ability to grasp the overall meaning or main idea of a story (Randi, et. al., 2010).

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Due to Weak central coherence, individuals with ASD may struggle in the following areas:

- Fixation on details
- Reading comprehension
- Literal thinking (i.e., "black-and-white" thinking)
- Generalizing information learned to different domains

<https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/autism-spectrum-disorder/articles/exploring-theory-mind-weak-central-cohesion-and-executive>

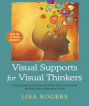

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Visualizing and Verbalizing (LMB) **talk about pictures with guided questioning**


Graphic Organizers

Teach **summarizing**

Teach how to **write a "gist" statement**

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The **GIST** (*Generating Interaction between Schemata and Text*) method is a **reading comprehension strategy** designed to help readers summarize text by identifying main ideas and condensing them into a concise statement, often 20 words or less. It focuses on identifying the "5 Ws and 1 H" (*who, what, when, where, why, how*) to distill complex information into its essential core.

Includes videos, cue cards, graphic organizers
<https://greatmiddleschools.org/toolkits/reading/get-the-gist/>

17-page How to:
https://www.readingrockets.org/sites/default/files/migrated/get_the_gist_comprehension_strategy.pdf

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del **GIST Summary** *del*

Name _____ Date _____

→ WHO ←	→ WHAT ←	→ WHEN ←
→ WHERE ←	→ WHY ←	→ HOW ←

Write your one-sentence GIST summary in the box below

©2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026, 2027, 2028, 2029, 2030, 2031, 2032, 2033, 2034, 2035, 2036, 2037, 2038, 2039, 2040, 2041, 2042, 2043, 2044, 2045, 2046, 2047, 2048, 2049, 2050, 2051, 2052, 2053, 2054, 2055, 2056, 2057, 2058, 2059, 2060, 2061, 2062, 2063, 2064, 2065, 2066, 2067, 2068, 2069, 2070, 2071, 2072, 2073, 2074, 2075, 2076, 2077, 2078, 2079, 2080, 2081, 2082, 2083, 2084, 2085, 2086, 2087, 2088, 2089, 2090, 2091, 2092, 2093, 2094, 2095, 2096, 2097, 2098, 2099, 2100

Write a 20-word gist summary? Can you reduce it to 10 words? What happens?

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Black and White Thinking

Situations are viewed only in extreme, binary terms – such as all-good or all-bad, success or failure – with no middle ground



Uses of absolute language or words like "always," "never," "perfect," or "ruined"

All or nothing mentality – I can't; won't accept help because nothing will change.

Inability to compromise (impacts personal and professional relationships).

It is "polarized thinking"; also called "dichotomous thinking"

Impacts self-concept

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Speech-Language Therapy



To teach black/white versus flexible thinking, make her aware of "gray" zones

Problem-solving activities with peers

Zones of Regulation to identify emotional state

Teach emotional vocabulary

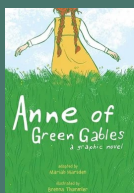
Incorporate personal drawings into social stories

Create comics to practice social skills and to assist with identification of / and understanding of facial expressions, gestures, and body language.

Study famous artwork with the same goals.

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Pictorial or Graphic Representation Graphic Novels



Lee, S., Quinn, S., & Jiang, Y. The Use of Pictorial or Graphic Representation in Reading Comprehension Interventions for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Meta-Analysis. *J Autism Dev Disord* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-025-07014-4>

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Boggs, J., Cohen, J., & Marchand, G. (2017). The effects of doodling on recall ability. *Psychological Thought*, 10(1), 206–216.



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Executive Functioning Challenges:

Difficulties with attention, memory, and cognitive flexibility can affect a student's ability to recall information or focus on reading tasks.



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Three Core (or Basic) Executive Skills*

Working Memory

2 parts: **Storage and Processing**
e.g., remembering directions while carrying them out, holding text meaning in mind while using decoding strategies as you read through a text, straining working memory which creates difficulties with sentence structure interpretation; maintaining thoughts/self-monitoring while writing.

Cognitive flexibility (shifting, switching)

Switching between ideas or activities; revising goals/plans; shifting
e.g., transitioning between tasks, juggling words' sounds & meanings; multiple meaning words.

Inhibition (self-control or inhibitory control)

Resisting impulses, controlling behavior, the ability to STOP and THINK
e.g., waiting turn, using words instead of grabbing, ignoring irrelevant word meanings or details, ignoring distractors in the environment while reading; reading too quickly just to get it done.

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Check out Sarah Ward's EF Checklists

Executive Function Skills Checklist

Cleaning

Sky is space (reading corner, cubbies) (5-7 years old)

Clean a Room (8-11 years old)

Develop and maintain a system of organization/cleaning (12-14 years old)

Manage Laundry, Keep Dorm/Apartment clean, deep clean at reasonable intervals EF Age:

Money

Simple get your shoes from the bathroom (3-4 years)

3-3 step direction put the placement on the table and then get the napkins (5-7 year)

With a time delay - to and from school without reminders (8-11 years)

Follow complex school schedule & multiple transitions with teachers and classrooms (12-14 years) EF Age:

Independently plan and follow schoolwork and leisure activities, drive own car EF Age:

Self-regulation

initiate unreciprocated or inappropriate behaviors (3-4 years)

initiate behaviors: follow safety rules, use appropriate language (e.g. not swearing or using bathroom language when not appropriate), use hand before sneezing in class, and fence hands to eat (3-5 years)

initiated regulate behaviors: maintain composure when teacher is out of the classroom; initiate temper tantrums and cool tantrums (6-11 years)


initiate use language in the presence of visible authority (12-14 years)

avoid recidivism on day behaviors (e.g. use of illegal substances, sexual acting out, shoplifting, or vandalism) (high school age) EF Age:


Reprinted from Dawson, G., & Foster, E. (2018). Executive Skills in Children and Adolescents. New York: The Guilford Press.

82


DYNAMICONS SELECT A DYNAMICON BY ITS USE:




Collect ideas




Make a choice (rays)



What to do next; sequences



Resolve a conflict; trouble getting started (barbells)



Know what to expect; hard time waiting (timeline)

Aaron Lanou is a member of Carol Gray's Team Social Stories, Aaron also provides Social Stories workshops and collaborates with Carol and the team to continually update and refine the Social Stories philosophy and approach.

<http://www.dynamicons.org/dynamicons>

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Sensory Processing Differences: Sensory overstimulation (e.g., noise, lighting) can impact a student's ability to focus on reading tasks.

Headphones for independent work or silent reading

Set up barriers Different seating/allow standing

Fidgets Monitor background noise

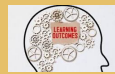
Chewing gum

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 More Resources

<https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com/social-stories-for-autistic-children/>

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- 1) List and describe the 3 reading disability subtypes.
- 2) Is the Literacy Screener used by your school effective in detecting HFA students who may be at-risk for a RD?
- 3) List 3 ways SLPs can identify reading and writing disorders in ASD students across grade levels?
- 4) What are some of the unique cognitive/EF characteristics that HFA students present with? How do these impact oral language, social-pragmatic language, and/or reading/writing?
- 5) List 3 parent resources.
- 6) List 2 strategies/methods to improve RC in young children on the spectrum and 2 for adolescent/high school students.
- 7) Describe the features of dysgraphia.

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Thank you for your attention
And engagement!

Dr. Karen T. Kimberlin
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