



Adaptation of learning content for students with SLDs
Educational Needs and Adaptations for students with SLDs

The four basic language skills and SLDs

Introduction

In this sheet, you will receive some practical advice on adaptations you can bring to your class activities to help your students with **Specific Learning Disorders (SLDs)** develop their 4 productive and receptive language skills. These skills are writing, speaking, reading and listening and they can be very challenging for students with SLDs.

The need behind this adaptation

Depending on their SLDs, students may be hindered in one or more language skills:

- **Dyslexia** comes with **reading and writing difficulties**
- **Dysgraphia** and dyspraxia with **writing**
- **Dysphasia** with **speaking and/or listening**

With simple adaptations, some barriers can be lifted, and the learning process can be facilitated.

What is this adaptation all about?

Reading

Providing your students with **worksheets that abide by the inclusive guidelines** will help those with reading difficulties, such as students with dyslexia. The guidelines for an inclusive layout can be found in our practice sheet “How to structure lessons and learning materials”. The basic aspects are to use a font of the sans-serif family (eg. Arial, Century Gothic, Open Sans, etc.), large enough (12pt or 14pt), aligned to the left and with a line spacing of 1,5 at least. Furthermore, the only text decoration that should be used to highlight things is bold (*italics*, underlining and CAPITALS should be avoided all the time).

Except from the layout point of view, other aspects should be taken into account:

- **Do not ask students with SLDs to read aloud in front of the other students**
 - Forcing them to read in front of the class will not only be unhelpful for their reading skill development but will also damage their self-esteem and may break their motivation.
- **Read task instructions or texts slowly enough and encourage questions to check understanding among the students**

Listening

Listening activities may be challenging for students with SLDs, who may, in addition to their disorder, have focus difficulties. Having **clear instructions before the task** may help them understand exactly what is expected of them, and relax.

- Use a **written prompt to provide instructions**.
 - The listening activity in itself is a challenge for some students, the instructions should be as clear as possible for everyone.

- **Check task comprehension** by asking students to repeat in their own words the task instructions.
- Break up explanations in **easy and manageable chunks**. Rule of thumb for students with SLDs: ask **one task at a time**.
- **Avoid literary devices** (metaphors, play on words, similes, etc.) and equivocal words or phrases when giving listening tasks.

Providing first a list of difficult or unknown words may also help them focus during the activity.

Writing

Writing may be very difficult for students with SLDs.

- When possible, **use handouts** instead of having SLD students copy text from a blackboard.
- Allow students that need it to **take notes on a computer**, as writing on a keyboard may be more manageable for them. Have a look at our practice sheet “Technology for students with SLDs” to read more on the subject.
- Make **vocabulary and tasks easy to understand**. Don’t hesitate to have brainstorming sessions and draw mind maps to link vocabulary together.
- Provide lists of keywords and phrases that your students may need for a written task.
- Make sure that each written **homework** is **relevant and reasonable**. You may want to have a look at the sheet “Homework and home study” to read more on the subject.

Speaking

Another language skill that can be the source of a lot of frustration and difficulties among your students, especially the ones with one or several SLDs, is speaking. Speaking can cause a lot of anxiety among the students, thus the need to implement adaptations and to establish an environment where students feel safe

- Be ready to **prompt students with appropriate words or phrases when needed**.
- Before you ask a student to answer questions orally, make sure he or she may know the answers well and **give support when needed**.
- Teach vocabulary your students may need for a speaking activity beforehand.

- For oral presentations, make sure to use **accessible topics related to their environment**: Who Am I?, My Family, My House, School, Food, Television, Shopping, Leisure, Clothes, Weather, Special Occasions, etc.
 - **Mind maps** could help your students prepare the presentation.

Feedback and corrections

Don't highlight every mistake that the student makes if there are many errors. Provide corrective feedback that is relevant to the activity: **concentrate on the effectiveness of communication**.

Have a look at the practice sheet "Assessment and feedback".

Video games to enhance the four basic language skills

It should be highlighted that **games can be great tools to tackle the four basic language skills** in a fun and engaging way.

Receptive skills: reading and listening in games

A lot of **reading** may be involved in video games. Additionally, every **text** is most of the time presented in **small parts**, which makes the reading feel **lighter** and **more manageable** for learners. Think of video **games such as RPGs** (Role Playing Games), for instance, that usually involve many written dialogues.

The other receptive skill, **listening**, is also extensively exploited in video games. Many dialogues or narrations of modern games are in oral forms. The **use of subtitles** can really help with language acquisition. For accessibility reasons, the option to activate subtitles should always be available.

Productive skills: writing and speaking in games

Productive language skills are also represented in games. For instance, cooperation games often require the players to **communicate over a written or oral channel**. The almost **endless possibilities in video game making** also allow integrating these skills more thoroughly in the game mechanics.



Conclusion

The **four basic language skills**, receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing), are a **vital part of language learning**. However, some skills may be particularly difficult to develop for some students. Depending on the disorder or disorders, the students with SLDs will be hindered in some of those skills. Following some basic guidelines to approach these skills in a more inclusive manner is essential for these students in need. Nowadays, video games can help approach these skills by engaging and motivating students towards acquiring English as a second or foreign language.

Resources and references

- O, C. (2013, October 7). Language-Based Learning Disability: Games to Improve Language Skills: Activities to Build Language. *Speech Buddies Blog: Speech, Language & Pronunciation Guides*. <https://www.speechbuddy.com/blog/speech-therapy-techniques/language-based-learning-disability-games-to-improve-language-skills/>
- *Help children improve their language skills using educational video games*. (n.d.). VisiHow. Retrieved 4 March 2022, from https://visihow.com/Help_children_improve_their_language_skills_using_educational_video_games
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