

Types of reading disabilities

By Gretchen Vierstra, MA

We partner with [Understood.org](https://www.understood.org) to provide educators and families with expert-vetted, evidence-based resources about learning differences.

Reading disabilities — also known as reading disorders — are specific learning disabilities that make reading challenging. The most well-known type of reading disability is **dyslexia**. But not all reading disabilities are dyslexia.

People with a reading disability typically have challenges in one, two, or all three areas below:

- Word reading accuracy
- Reading comprehension
- Reading fluency

Here is some more information about different types of reading disabilities.

1. Trouble with word reading accuracy

People who have trouble with word reading accuracy struggle to break down the sounds of spoken language. They can also struggle to match those sounds with written symbols. This is known as **phonological awareness**.

Trouble with word reading accuracy makes it harder to sound out or **“decode” words**. That makes it hard to read fluently and accurately.

When people talk generally about dyslexia, they’re often thinking about trouble with word reading accuracy.

2. Trouble with reading comprehension

Reading comprehension means understanding what's been read. People who struggle with reading comprehension may have difficulty with:

- Word meanings
- Tying information together
- Monitoring their understanding
- Making inferences
- Remembering what they read

Challenges with word reading accuracy often overlap with reading comprehension issues. But some people with reading comprehension difficulties have no trouble decoding words – they just don't understand what they've read.

Some people who struggle with reading comprehension may have related challenges. For example, they may have a **language disorder**, which can impact how people use and process language. Or they may have **trouble with working memory**, which can make it hard to remember what's been read.

3. Trouble with reading fluency

Reading fluency means reading with speed, accuracy, and the right expression. Reading speed, also called reading rate, is the number of words a person can read correctly per minute. Fluent readers are able to read accurately at a good pace. When they read aloud, they do it in a way that shows they understand the sentence structure and punctuation.

People who have trouble with fluency take longer than others to read words accurately and understand their meaning. They might also read aloud without expression.

Many people with dyslexia have trouble with fluency. Trouble with fluency can also be related to slow **processing speed**.

Reading disabilities impact learning, but they're not a problem of intelligence. People with reading disabilities are just as smart as their peers.

And not all reading difficulties are caused by a reading disability. For example, trouble with focus can make it hard to concentrate on reading. Vision problems can make it hard to track words.

Learn more about [what can cause trouble with reading](#).

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