

Why do Smart Students Struggle With Reading?

WRITTEN BY:

Gayle Moyers, CET

In my 40+ years of teaching and watching research over the years I have come to the conclusion that most students are smart enough, care enough, and want to succeed at learning. Teaching reading isn't hard if we ask the right questions.

How do students learn? Once they are nourished, maintain appropriate sleep and rest patterns, get some exercise daily, and feel safe and loved, they should be ready to respond to instruction.

It is important to realize that learning can be looked at as a five step process: *Sensory input, perception (awareness) of the input, conceptualization (understanding) of the input, then storage and retrieval.* Each step toward learning mastery depends upon the preceding step.

Reading is "talk" on paper. Since "talk" is processed through the auditory center of the brain, it is reasonable to assume that reading is also processed through the auditory center. Tina tells it best:

Tina was eight years old when she was referred to me as a reading specialist. She came to me with stacks of evaluations and was diagnosed with dyslexia, and visual processing disorders. I was testing her for placement in the school reading remediation program. Typically, she would look at the word uncle and say lunch. Her parents and teachers thought it was a *visual problem because she "scrambled the letters."* She was unable to spell and wrote the same way she read words.

At the conclusion of my standardized testing I asked Tina to go back to the Word Identification test and just look at the words she had just attempted to read and tell me the letters "from the front of the word." She completed 78 words and she never missed a letter. She never omitted a letter. She never changed the order of the letters: e.g. u-n-c-l-e. Then I asked Tina, "What do you think makes spelling and reading hard for you?" She replied without hesitation, "I know what it is. My ears trick me. I can't tell if what I say matches what I see."

Tina did not have the basic listening skills required for her to achieve independence and fluency in reading.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) 2004 states:

*Dyslexia is **not** diagnosed or defined as a visual problem or one that necessarily involves reversals, transpositions, and mirror writing. The task of the reader is to break the code, to map symbols to sounds. If the person can't differentiate subtle differences in sound he or she cannot break the code.*

Good listeners are good learners. Think of learning as a job to be done and the learner needs a "toolbox" to take on the job. What are the tools needed for children and adults to be able to acquire competency in reading? Most important, it is not about hearing; it is a person's ability to perform specific listening tasks that relate to receiving the message accurately and clearly. To understand this, think about a time when you have had a bad cell phone

signal. You were only able to receive bits and pieces of the incoming message. Maybe you could fill in the missing parts (auditory closure); not all people can. Poor reading and spelling, and poor attention and focus are good predictors of an inadequately developed listening system. Before we decide a person is not going to be able to learn phonics for reading and spelling we need to determine if there is a *listening problem*.

When I address the issue of listening training for improved auditory input first, and then proceed to reading, spelling and writing instruction, the results are amazing.

For more information:

Teri James Bellis, Ph.D, *When the Brain Can't Hear*

Paul Madaule, *When Listening Comes Alive*

Pierre Sollier, *Listening for Wellness*

Alfred A. Tomatis, *The Ear and Language*

Gayle Moyers is the founder of [Moyers Learning Systems](#). She is a passionate and gifted teacher with more than forty years experience. Her knowledge and expertise have led thousands of teachers and students to discover abilities and potential that others would not consider possible. Her pioneer work with learning and music offers parents and professionals new paths to gain skills and confidence to successfully guide students to achieve their highest potential. She can be reached at: gmoyers@sbcglobal.net