



Modern Foreign Languages and Dyslexia: A survivors' guide to Languages and the National Curriculum

What are Modern Foreign Languages?

The National Curriculum states that 'During Key Stage 3, pupils begin to understand, speak, read and write at least one modern foreign language.' Modern Foreign Languages are those that are spoken in the world. This is not Ancient Greek and Latin, which have almost died out. Each school must offer at least one language that is spoken in the EU: Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Modern Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Swedish.

Dyslexic students have difficulty with their native language, and so it is surely going to be harder for them to learn a second. On the other hand, the benefits of knowing a foreign language are often underestimated.

This information sheet is designed to help dyslexic students get the most out of learning a foreign language. It is aimed at parents and students. It is also to help teachers understand the needs of their students who have dyslexia, and for those who want to know if there is a way out.

Is it possible for someone who is dyslexic to learn a foreign language?

Dyslexia specialists generally agree that dyslexic children should be given an opportunity to learn a foreign language. In a natural situation, they can learn to speak a foreign language well. Some students even find their dyslexia an advantage because their oral skills are more practised. Dyslexics learning a foreign language have to be aware that it may be a longer process than for them than for others. It is important also to consider which language would be most suitable.

Language	Strengths and Weaknesses	Conclusion
French	The words are not written as they sound: there are silent endings on words, it is difficult to separate words in phrases and there are irregular verbs.	The language dyslexics will find most difficult.
German	The sound-spelling relationship is good: words are spelt as they sound. It has the same roots as English, which makes it easier, but long compound words can be a problem,	Initial achievement is quite rapid, but it gets much harder.

Spanish	Good sound-spelling relationship. Spanish is similar to English in its sound system, and has a regular verb system with few irregularities.	The best language for dyslexics to learn.
Italian	Has a regular spelling system, but is quite different to English in its sound system. There are many irregular verbs.	Will be very challenging to begin with.

How can language learning be made easier for the dyslexic student?

Many schools only offer French as an option. If this is the case, it is important to find out if your Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) will provide additional support. Make the most of this facility, as it is there to use.

French and English are very different. This can cause problems. These are outlined below:

- It may be difficult to pronounce sounds that are not used in English, such as the nasal /**u**/ in words like **un** or **lune**.
- It may be difficult to remember how the accent affects the sound.
- Learning and remembering vocabulary will be difficult. Dyslexics need to have things repeated many times before they are stored in the long-term memory.
- Similar sounding words may be confused because dyslexia affects phonological discrimination skills.
- The words are pronounced very differently to how they appear in written form. This will cause great problems in both reading and writing.
- Spelling will be very difficult because words are not spelt as they sound. Any techniques that are used for English will not apply to French.
- The grammatical rules are very different to English, and grammatical concepts that have not been previously taught will be hard to remember and use.
- The word order of French may cause difficulty because of the differences in the sentence structure. For example, instead of saying 'Mrs' Brown's dog,' in French you would say, 'The dog of Mrs Brown': *Le chien de Madame Brown*.
- Homophones: words that sound the same, can look the same, but mean different things. These are particularly common in French, where, for example *chez* and *chaise* are pronounced differently, where *chez* can be translated as 'belonging to...' and *chaise* means 'chair.' Make sure you know the difference and are aware that they exist.

How can study skills help in learning a foreign language?

Study skills and language learning strategies will both be useful. Study skills are general learning skills such as organisation, planning, comprehending, revision techniques and exam strategies. The school or SENCO will be able to give further advice on this.

Language learning strategies are specific to Modern Foreign Languages, and will help tackle some of the difficulties that may be encountered. These are noted below:

- Using flash cards (3 x 5 is a good size) to help you to memorise vocabulary. It will be useful to add pictures, colours and anything else that aids memory.
- Colour-coding grammatical devices will help the student to remember things: for example, orange for male, purple for females, green for plural. If the student is colour-blind, avoid red and green.
- If remembering the word order is difficult, put the words onto card, cut up the card into separate phrases, mix them up and put them back together again to practice.
- In order to remember vocabulary, try to practice it in many different ways: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. It may take more time to begin with, but it will stop the student having to learn the same word over and over.
- If pronunciation is a source of difficulty, ask the teacher to record some of the words on tape so that practice at home is possible. If listening is difficult, ask the teacher to put some practice exercises onto a tape to listen to.
- Many people find it easier to remember a word if they associate it with a visual image or picture. Try putting pictures next to the words, and the picture may be recalled faster than the actual word.

It is all a question of finding out what works for the individual. Then it is possible to explore these methods further.

Materials have been written specifically for those who have difficulty learning foreign languages. It would be useful and helpful to have a look at some of these:

French: Val Lawson has created 'Arrivé!' which is a 2-3 year course for KS3 learners. It can be downloaded from www.largeprint.org. It is broken up into modules and each worksheet could correspond to a class.

La Francais, c'est facile! By Sue Brown and Sue Dean is a practical and clear resource book, which also includes a tape of songs, which will help you remember things, especially lists. It is published by John Murray Publishers.

For games and memorising vocabulary techniques, look to www.senter.co.uk. Jouez en Francais is a series of worksheets to help memorise vocabulary, while Jeux en Francais is a series of games which reinforces this vocabulary.

'Star French is a CD-ROM designed to support the GCSE syllabus. It caters for all levels of ability and has tasks designed to help with pronunciation, word order, spelling and key phrases. It costs £59.99 and is available from Fisher-Marriott at www.fisher-marriott.com.

German: 'Willkommen!' is the German equivalent of 'Arrivé', again by Val Lawson, and available from the above website.

Deutsch, kein Problem is a resource book for those learning German, and comes with a tape of songs from John Murray Publishers.

Spanish: There is also a Spanish version of the resource games book: ¿Español? ¡Ningún problema! Again, these are available from John Murray Publishers, and have a look at www.senter.co.uk

Is it possible to stay motivated?

Firstly, it must be remembered that language learning is possible, at least to a certain level. One way of doing this is by changing the perception of learning a foreign language. It is not impossible, it is simply challenging. By breaking these challenges down they can be achieved.

Secondly, the teacher will not be able to spend hours trying to motivate the student. The student has to do this for himself, and this is vital to success. Try this technique: Imagine how you will feel on results day, and every time you tell people your exam result, or write your grades on an application form for a job. Do you want to feel proud of that result? The answer will almost certainly be 'yes'.

Learning a foreign language is hard work, especially for dyslexics, and therefore it may take more determination to succeed. But a foreign language is a useful skill, even if it is only to a low level of competence. Employers do look more favourably upon those applicants who can speak some of a language.

Motivation is difficult even for the most able students, especially in a foreign language. The key is breaking down what has to be learnt into small, achievable chunks. Small successes lead to overall success. For example, if there is a long list of vocabulary to learn, it can be done by breaking it down into five words a day.

These can be practised by speaking, reading and writing, and even listening if it is put onto tape. When this is achieved, the next set of five can be learnt.

If there is something is not clear how to break down, for example, a complex grammatical sequence, ask the teacher how to break it down. If the student explains that this is a learning technique, the teacher should be willing to help.

At the same time, remember that a dyslexic strength is the ability to see the overall picture: this is a right-brained skill, and dyslexics are often called 'right-brained thinkers.' It is a good idea to ask the teacher for an overall plan of the term's lessons. Then the student can understand why some things are learnt and not others, and where the lessons are ultimately leading.

Is extra time allowed in MFL exams?

Extra time is allowed in Modern Foreign Languages exams. For more information, see our information sheet P06. Special Arrangements in Assessment and Examinations.

Many dyslexic students could have a history of hearing difficulties, which might entitle them to additional arrangements for the listening part of the exam. For further information on exam considerations, refer to the JCGQ Publication: Regulations and Guidance relating to Candidates with Special Requirements from www.jcgq.org.uk

Is there any technology that can help learning a foreign language?

Technology to help you learn to speak a foreign language, and can also be used to help you pronounce and translate. However, you will need to find out how acceptable these are in exam conditions. The best place to look is www.dyslexic.com

Technology available includes:

Product	Description	Languages	Price
Multilingual Pocket Translators Franklin (UK) Ltd	Translator, phonetic spellchecker with useful phrases.	5 -11 languages including French, German, Spanish and Italian	£12.76 - £34.03 including VAT
Pocket Bilingual Dictionaries Franklin (UK) Ltd	Electronic dictionary with verb tables, phonetic spelling.	French, German and Spanish	£59.97 excluding VAT
Speaking Bilingual Dictionaries Franklin (UK) Ltd	Speaks letter, word and definition. Can speak useful phrases.	French, German and Spanish, also Chinese	£102.12 excluding VAT; £127.65 for English/Chinese
Wordmaster Travel Plus Franklin (UK) Ltd	Thesaurus, spellchecker and translator. Checks English spelling.	French only.	£17.01 excluding VAT
Quicktionary Translator Pen WizCom Inc.	Portable handheld scanner can translate and reads different fonts.	French, German, Spanish and Italian	£129.99 excluding VAT

Note: In order to apply for VAT relief, you must apply to www.dyslexia.com directly. They have a simple form, which you can print off.

For mail order enquiries, ring 0800 018 0045, or write to: iANSYST Ltd., Fen House, Fen Road, Cambridge CB4 1UN e-mail: sales@dyslexic.com www.dyslexic.com

Are there any useful books that can help me?

CPG Study Guides are popular and useful guides. They can be used during the whole course and during revision. They set things out in a straightforward way. There are workbooks, which are useful for using in addition to lessons, and revision guides, to cover everything before exams. They are written in accordance with the National Curriculum, alongside teachers and students, and are often funny, with colourful and interesting pictures and examples.

Workbooks are useful tools to use because they reinforce everything that has been learnt in the lesson. They can often explain things in a clearer manner than the teacher who is pressed for time can. They come with exercises and useful phrases, to show that what has been learnt is useful and worthwhile.

The CPG study guides are available in:

French: Workbooks, Revision Guides and Practice papers.

German: Revision Guide

Spanish: Revision Guide

Their French texts are the most developed, but it is likely that German and Spanish will follow suit.

To contact CPG publications, either visit their website at www.cpgbooks.co.uk or phone 0800 750 1262. Publications are also available from most good book shops.

What else is there to help me learn and revise?

The BBC's Bitesize programme covers French, German and Spanish, from basic levels to GCSE and beyond with forums, practice pages for reading and writing, and even speaking and listening in German. It is worth looking at the grammar section and the vocabulary help. There are links to other helpful web pages to help with reading in the language. Also it is worth looking at www.bbc.co.uk/education/ for other useful sites. Closer to exams, look out for the Bitesize programmes on television - they are often on late at night. The 'Learning Zone' programmes may also be useful. They cover French, German, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Portuguese.

It will be helpful to have past exam papers, which the teacher will have. If more are wanted, either get the Past Papers books in French from CPG publications, or visit the appropriate exam board website: www.aqa.org.uk is a good place to start. These will often have past papers that you can download.

Other subjects are suffering because of the students' difficulty with foreign languages. Is there any way to stop studying a foreign language?

Even though learning a foreign language is part of the National Curriculum, it is possible to 'disapply', under the 1996 Education Act. This means that the student does not have to take classes or exams in that subject. Disapplication will usually be relevant at Key Stage 4, that is, years 10 and 11, when the GCSE course is imminent.

For a full outline of the procedure, visit www.dfes.gov.uk/natcurr/disapply or ring 0800 000 2288 and ask for a copy of the leaflet 'Disapplication of the National Curriculum.' Disapplication is permitted through a statement of Special Educational Needs, as may be the case for some dyslexic students. It is also possible to disapply for specific purposes (for example, just for Key Stage 4) or temporarily.

Disapplication for specific purposes is specific to Key Stage 4 learning, that is, GCSE level. Disapplication is allowed if it will either:

- Allow a pupil to participate in extended work-related learning, or
- Allow a pupil with particular strengths to emphasise those strengths in another subject, or
- Allow a pupil making significantly less progress than others of his or her age to consolidate his or her learning and progress across the curriculum.

It is this final point which will be applicable in the situation outlined above. Modern foreign languages are noted as a subject which may be suitable for disapplication. This is because they are time-consuming and that time may be better spent in further study of a core subject such as English or Maths. It should be noted that something must replace the language lessons: it cannot be free time!

In order to disapply for specific purposes, the following conditions must be satisfied:

- The school must agree to make disapplication available. This is the right of the school, not the parent or guardian.
- The pupil in question must be in the early stages of Year 9 at the time of application, although for disapplication for consolidation of learning, the pupil can be at any stage in Key Stage 4.
- The headteacher must agree that the educational advantages of disapplication will outweigh the disadvantages.
- There must be a structured curriculum plan. The school must monitor this.
- Disapplication must not hinder the pupils' opportunities of further study.

Disapplication through a statement of special educational needs will apply to those pupils for whom disapplication for specific purposes is insufficient. The pupil must have a Statement of Special Needs that recommends if certain areas of the curriculum should be disapplied. In that statement, there will also be suggestions on what should replace the teaching time and an explanation of how the pupils' curriculum will remain balanced.

For more information on Special Educational Needs, request a copy of 'Special Educational Needs (SEN) A guide for parents and carers' from the Department of Education:

DfES Publications Centre PO Box 5050 Tel: 0845 602 2260

Sherwood Park Web: www.dfes.gov.uk/sen

Annersley E-mail: dfes@prolog.uk.com

Nottingham NG15 0DJ

If disapplication from learning a Modern Foreign Language is believed to be necessary, the student must comply with these criteria. It is the headteacher who has responsibility for disapplication. Therefore it is advisable to speak to the headteacher before going any further.

Recently, the government has published the Green Paper. This is a document that suggests changes that should be made to education. It has been decided that Modern Foreign Languages should no longer be compulsory. Each student still has to have the opportunity to learn a foreign language. So languages will become an option, not a core subject. However, each school will be able to decide if it makes languages compulsory or not.

These measures will take up to five years to be put into practice. This is because they are changes to the National Curriculum. Until then, the measures outlined above are the ones to follow.