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Irlen Syndrome, Dyslexia or Both?

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Texas Definition of Dyslexia

- Texas Education Code (TEC) §38.003 defines dyslexia in the following way:
- (1) “Dyslexia” means a disorder of constitutional origin manifested by a difficulty in learning to read, write, or spell, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity.
- (2) “Related disorders” include disorders similar to or related to dyslexia such as developmental auditory imperceptions, dysphasia, specific developmental dyslexia, developmental dysgraphia, and developmental spelling disability.

International Dyslexia Association Definition

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

- (Adopted by the International Dyslexia Association Board of Directors, November 12, 2002)

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The highlighted parts are also characteristics of Irlen.

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The Dyslexia Handbook, Revised 2014

Students identified as having dyslexia typically experience primary difficulties in phonological awareness, including phonemic awareness and manipulation, single-word reading, reading fluency, and spelling. Consequences may include difficulties in reading comprehension and/or written expression. These difficulties in phonological awareness are unexpected for the student's age and educational level and are not primarily the result of language difference factors. Additionally, there is often a family history of similar difficulties.

The Dyslexia Handbook, Revised 2014

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The highlighted parts could also be Irlen.

Second and Third Grade

- x Difficulty recognizing common sight words (e.g., “to,” “said,” “been”)
- x Difficulty decoding single words
- x Difficulty recalling the correct sounds for letters and letter patterns in reading
- x Difficulty connecting speech sounds with appropriate letter or letter combinations and omitting letters in words for spelling (e.g., “after” spelled “eftr”)
- x Difficulty reading fluently (e.g., slow, inaccurate, and/or without expression)
- x Difficulty decoding unfamiliar words in sentences using knowledge of phonics
- x Reliance on picture clues, story theme, or guessing at words
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Fourth Through Sixth Grade

- x Difficulty reading aloud (e.g., fear of reading aloud in front of classmates)
- x Avoidance of reading (e.g., particularly for pleasure)
- x Acquisition of less vocabulary due to reduced independent reading
- x Use of less complicated words in writing that are easier to spell than more appropriate words (e.g., "big" instead of "enormous")
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Middle Through High School

- x Difficulty with the volume of reading and written work
- x Frustration with the amount of time required and energy expended for reading
- x Difficulty with written assignments
- x Tendency to avoid reading (particularly for pleasure)
- x Difficulty learning a foreign language

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Trait	Irlen	Dyslexia	ADD/ADHD
Skips words or lines	✓	✓	✓
Loses place	✓	✓	✓
Slow or choppy reading	✓	✓	✓
Poor comprehension	✓	✓	✓
Avoids reading	✓	✓	✓
Takes breaks	✓	✓	✓
Family history	✓	✓	✓

The Light Barrier by Rhonda Stone p. 134-136

Trait	Irlen	Dyslexia	ADD/ADHD
Confuses numbers	✓	✓	
Visual distortions	✓	✓	
Unequal letter spacing	✓	✓	✓
Difficulty writing on a line or column	✓	✓	✓
Poor handwriting	✓	✓	✓
Struggles to do written work	✓	✓	✓
Lacks self-confidence	✓	✓	✓

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Trait	Irlen	Dyslexia	ADD/ADHD
Rubs eyes	✓		
Reads in dim light	✓		
Squints or blinks when reading	✓		
Print or white is moving on the page	✓		
Eyes burn or itch	✓		
Difficulty with rote memory		✓	
Late in learning to speak		✓	

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p. 134-136

Trait	Irlen	Dyslexia	ADD/ADHD
Cannot follow verbal directions		✓	✓
Talks excessively			✓
Difficulty sounding out words		✓	
Difficulty connecting letter to sound		✓	
Cannot take turns or wait			✓
Constant motion			✓
Poor sense of self	✓	✓	✓

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Trait	Irlen	Dyslexia	ADD/ADHD
Present in average and gifted readers	✓		✓
Photophobia: Increased difficulty with glare: fluorescent lighting	✓		
Rapid improvement with treatment	✓		?
Strain and fatigue when reading	✓		✓
Narrowing of span of recognition	✓		

Insights on Learning Disabilities 11(2). 129-169, 2014

Importance of Proper and Timely Identification

Irlen Syndrome must be identified first and quickly.

If the student cannot see the page correctly, it does not matter how good the teacher or dyslexia program is, the student will not succeed.

References

The Dyslexia Handbook, Revised 2014

The Light Barrier by Rhonda Stone

“Meares-Irlen/Visual Stress Syndrome, Classroom Fluorescent Lighting and Reading Difficulties: A Review of the Literature” by Stephen J. Loew, Graham L. Jones, Kenneth Watson, *Insights on Learning Disabilities*, 11(2), 129-169, 2014.