



Empowering Children. Supporting Families. Building Brighter Futures.

#### Resource 091 | Learning disorders

# Dysgraphia and written-expression difficulties

## What it means

Dysgraphia is used in different ways to describe difficulties with handwriting or written production. Written-expression difficulties may also involve spelling, sentence construction, and organizing ideas. The label is not identical across diagnostic systems. Assessment should specify which processes are difficult and provide support based on those needs. [1]

## Causes and risk factors

Writing draws on language, learning, attention, visual-motor coordination, and fine motor skills. Difficulties may arise from a specific learning disorder, motor coordination needs, language problems, or overlapping factors. Poor handwriting alone does not explain every writing problem or establish a single cause. [1,2]

General family education. A concern deserves assessment, but this guide does not diagnose a child or prescribe treatment.



## Signs and everyday impact

School-age signs can include slow or hard-to-read handwriting, trouble forming letters, persistent spelling difficulties, or difficulty translating ideas into written sentences. Fatigue or avoidance may occur. Preschool children naturally vary in drawing and early mark-making; those activities alone are insufficient for a definitive written-expression diagnosis. [1,2]

## Assessment and diagnosis

Evaluation reviews handwriting, spelling, composition, language, instruction, and learning progress. Motor, vision, or occupational therapy assessment is added when relevant. The team distinguishes a handwriting problem from broader written-language difficulties and considers co-occurring conditions. Findings should describe functional needs rather than rely on one ambiguous label. [1,2]

## Treatment and therapy

Support may include explicit handwriting and writing instruction, spelling teaching, planning tools, and guided practice. Occupational therapy addresses relevant motor or task-access difficulties, while educational and speech-language professionals address language and composition needs. Keyboarding, speech-to-text, or reduced copying can improve access when appropriate. Progress should be checked across actual classroom tasks. [1,2,3,4]

## Support at home

Offer enjoyable drawing and writing activities suited to age and ability. Use the educator's chosen practice steps without lengthy repetitive drills. Allow other ways to express ideas when writing mechanics become a barrier. Ask about comfortable tools and positioning, and keep tasks manageable.

## When to seek help

Request assessment when writing problems persist and restrict school participation. Sudden loss of hand function, weakness, pain, or loss of established skills requires medical evaluation.

## Questions for your care team

- Is the main difficulty handwriting, spelling, composition, or a combination?
- Which instruction and therapy roles are appropriate?
- What tools or accommodations improve access now?



## Podcast preparation

Use this outline to develop a later podcast script.

### Suggested opening

Welcome to Mariel Early Intervention. Today we discuss dysgraphia and written-expression difficulties. Dysgraphia is used in different ways to describe difficulties with handwriting or written production. This is general education; each child needs individualized care.

**Opening:** Define the topic and its developmental context.

**Understanding:** Explain causes and signs without inviting self-diagnosis.

**Assessment:** Describe evaluation and distinguish screening from diagnosis.

**Support:** Discuss treatment, therapy, and practical family supports.

**Closing:** Explain urgent signs and one clear next step.

Misconception to address: Myth: all writing difficulties are solved by handwriting practice. Language and composition may need separate support.

Before recording: update clinical references and local service details, arrange clinical review, and use fully consented or fictional examples.

### Terms in plain language

- Written expression: communicating ideas through written language.
- Visual-motor coordination: combining visual information with movement.
- Speech-to-text: technology that converts spoken words into written text.

### Sources and further reading

Sources accessed 3 October 2026. Numbered references support the clinical overview. Treatment availability and referral routes vary by country.

**[1] Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development - NICHD**

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/factsheets/learningdisabilities>

**[2] Learning Disability Evaluation**

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/learning-disabilities/Pages/Learning-Disability-Evaluation.aspx?form=HealthyChildren>

**[3] What are the treatments for learning disabilities?**

<https://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/learning/conditioninfo/treatment>

**[4] Evidence-based diagnosis and treatment for specific learning disabilities involving impairments in written and/or oral language - PubMed**

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21383108/>