Structured Literacy

A guide for teaching and supporting adults to learn the initial building blocks of reading.

"We just wanted to send an email to say how fantastic the Adult Dyslexia Hub is. We are finding it to be such a useful and helpful resource for some learners with us. Thank you for the development."

(ETB Adult Literacy Organiser)

Important Note

If you have the **digital version** of this booklet, you can click on the blue writing to access websites and resources.

If you have the **printed version**, please see the end of the booklet where you can find a list of websites.

Contents

1. Introduction

This instructional guide is designed to accompany the Structured Literacy videos available on Dyslexia Ireland's Adult Dyslexia Hub. These video resources are accessible, free of charge, and are for all adult learners with significant literacy needs, whether they have been formally identified as having dyslexia or not.

This programme is suitable for adult learners who have significant gaps with the initial building blocks of reading and spelling. It might not suit those learners who have more advanced skills in this area.

In this short booklet, we provide guidance for people supporting adult learners (such as literacy tutors). The booklet explains some key principles and strategies to effectively help adults improve their basic reading and spelling skills. This guide shows how you can integrate the content from the Adult Dyslexia Hub into a learning programme to support your learners using a structured literacy approach.

Through a series of videos, adult learners wishing to improve their literacy can use this programme to develop and practice their skills independently. As a literacy tutor, you can support your learner by guiding them through the process when needed and by keeping a record of their progress.

2. Understanding Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a learning difference that can cause difficulties with reading, learning, and work. It affects approximately 1 in 10 people. It occurs on a spectrum, with some people mildly affected, and others more severely.

With the right understanding, accommodations, and support, people with dyslexia can achieve success in education, the workplace, and in wider society.

Everyone with dyslexia is different, but there is a commonality of difficulties with reading, spelling, and writing, as well as related cognitive/processing difficulties. Dyslexia is not a general difficulty with learning - instead, it impacts specific skill areas.

One common difficulty shared by all dyslexic learners is phonological (or 'speech sounds') processing. This makes it harder for individuals to make the connection between letters and the sounds they make, which in turn impacts their reading and spelling abilities.

In reading, individuals with dyslexia struggle to decode words – that is, they find it difficult to match the letters in a word with the sounds they represent. Conversely, in spelling, they find it challenging to encode sounds into written letters accurately.

The impact of dyslexia can change according to the environment (i.e. what a dyslexic person is being asked to do and under what circumstances). While people with dyslexia may develop strengths due to their dyslexia such as determination, problem-solving, and resilience, dyslexia does not automatically bring specific gifts or talents.


Dyslexia Ireland recognises and respects the individual variation that all human beings display, including those with dyslexia.

Some people prefer the wording 'a person with dyslexia', while others prefer the term 'a dyslexic person'. When working with individuals it is important to use the terminology that the person is most comfortable with.

When communicating with a wider audience, you can use both terms to reflect the variation of preference that exists. Dyslexia is a recognised disability under Irish and European law, such as under equalities, accessibility, and disability legislation. However, many dyslexic people do not consider themselves 'disabled' and the individual's view should be respected.

Dyslexia Ireland's Voices of Dyslexia provides a rich resource of personal perspectives of dyslexia from adults in Ireland who have a lived experience of dyslexia.
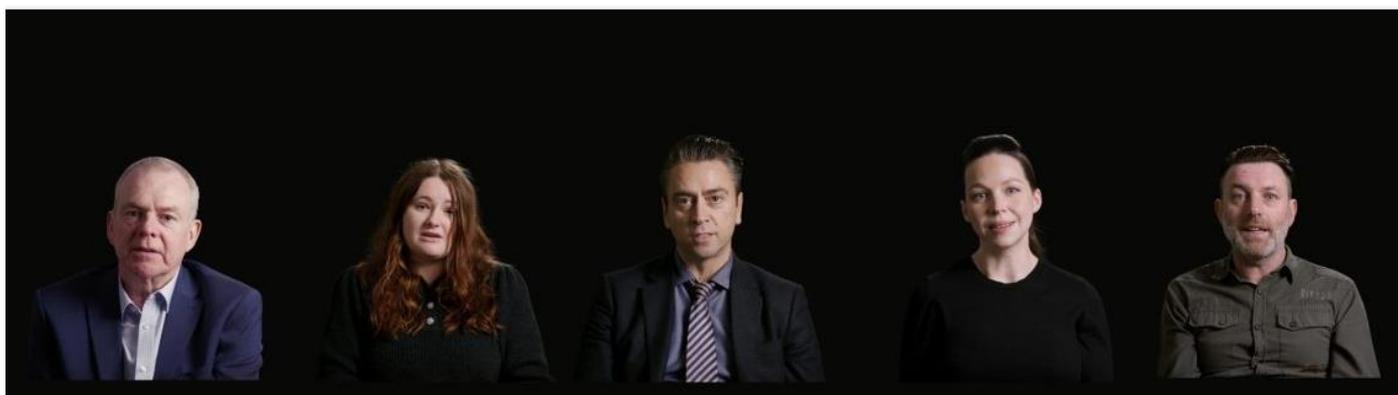
3. The Science of Reading

The Science of Reading is a term that represents the settled science about how individuals best learn to read, including how those with underlying literacy difficulties can be supported in this regard.

There are some core complementary theories that are central in the Science of Reading, and these are briefly summarised below.

Ladder of Reading & Writing

Nancy Young's Ladder of Reading and Writing (2023) identified that while some individuals can learn to read without a structured literacy approach, the vast majority of learners benefit from this approach, and a significant minority (i.e. dyslexic individuals) **absolutely require** a structured literacy approach as **necessary** to develop their literacy skills. This structured approach is in contrast to a 'whole language' approach that focuses on concepts such as exposure to text, or motivation to read, which have been proven **not to be sufficient** for developing literacy skills in dyslexic learners.

Simple View of Reading

The Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) identified two vital components required to be a successful reader – one is decoding, and the other is

language comprehension. Without sufficient competency in both of these, good reading skills will be unlikely to develop. A structured literacy approach focuses on the first of these two components, i.e. **decoding**.

Reading Rope

Hollis Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) model further broke down the skills of decoding into the three strands – **phonological awareness**, **decoding**, and **sight words.** All of these necessary skills are woven together in competent readers to allow them to decode written text successfully.

Structured Literacy

A structured literacy programme is a systematic and explicit approach to teaching decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling) based on the Science of Reading. It focuses on phonological awareness, sound/letter association, and it integrates decoding (reading) and encoding (spelling skills). It is designed to have carefully sequenced lessons that build upon each other, starting from the very basics and progressing to more complex concepts. Structured literacy programmes are not specifically designed to support dyslexic adults - they are for everyone. However, they are especially important for dyslexic learners.

4. Structured Literacy Videos

The Structured Literacy videos found online on Dyslexia Ireland's Adult Dyslexia Hub are based on the Science of Reading. They provide a video resource to help dyslexic adults with under-developed decoding skills to improve their abilities in this area. The videos are **accessible** and **completely free** for everyone.

This approach is about giving learners the tools they need to become skilled **decoders** (readers) and **encoders** (spellers).

The videos are designed so they can be accessed in different ways depending on the learner's needs. So, a learner can use them independently as part of their own learning, or for practice in their own time, even with their mobile phone.

Alternatively, the videos can be used as part of tutoring sessions with adult literacy tutors.

These videos are very carefully **structured**. They are based on a clear 'scope and sequence' (i.e. what is taught, and the order it is taught). They begin with key sound/letter matching (phonics). Then they introduce 'digraphs' (where more than one letter makes a single sound, e.g. 'sh', th'). Finally, the videos integrate the reading and spelling of words using decoding and encoding skills.

Structured Literacy Programme Scope & Sequence Levels 1-24

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4
a e i o u p t s n	m d g	b f c/k	l
Level 5	**Level 6**	**Level 7**	**Level 8**
r	h j v w y z	x qu wr kn	sh ch
Level 9	**Level 10**	**Level 11**	**Level 12**
th wh ng	nk all s as /z/ REVIEW	tricky words	magic e words
Level 13	**Level 14**	**Level 15**	**Level 16**
multi-syllable words	ai ay homophones	oa homophones	ee ea homophones REVIEW
Level 17	**Level 18**	**Level 19**	**Level 20**
oo	Adding ING	oi oy	ow ou
Level 21	**Level 22**	**Level 23**	**Level 24**
aw au	open syllable words	soft g soft c	er endings REVIEW

The programme very quickly introduces words and multi-syllabic words, and it highlights 'rules', conventions, and strategies to empower the learner to read and spell with confidence.
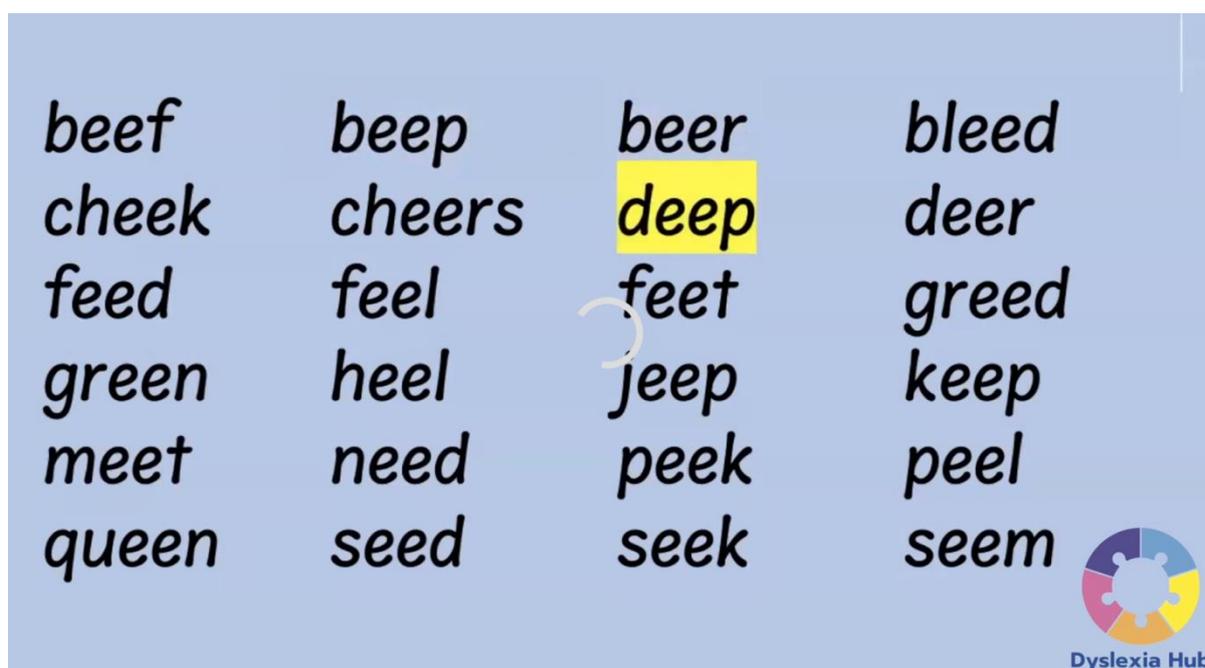
The programme involves **explicit teaching**, where key learning concepts are articulated and reinforced explicitly so that the learner is not left to establish rules or strategies by themselves. 'Exceptions to the rule' are also identified at the appropriate time, with reassurance and guidance provided in these cases. It is a key underpinning concept of the programme that the learner is not left alone to navigate literacy – instead, they are expertly guided.

The lessons are **cumulative**, in that all skills and words learned at each level are continuously revisited in subsequent levels of the programme. In this way, learners reinforce their learning. Also, reading and spelling of the same words are introduced at the same time, which provides more opportunities to review the same learning, or practise the same word.

The **breadth** of the programme allows it to introduce as many words as possible, as early as possible, to illustrate each key concept as it is taught. This can help increase motivation as a single learning point can 'unlock' many words and the learner can feel like they are making progress and have momentum with their learning. All words are also designed to be already in an adult learner's vocabulary, and unusual or esoteric words are avoided.

beef	beep	beer	bleed
cheek	cheers	deep	deer
feed	feel	feet	greed
green	heel	jeep	keep
meet	need	peek	peel
queen	seed	seek	seem

Dyslexia Hub

Use of the videos can be **differentiated** to suit the needs of the learner. The multiple-level design allows learners, or their tutors, to identify an appropriate starting point. It also allows learners to revisit previous learning if any subsequent learning gaps are identified.

The programme's flexibility allows **scheduling** of sessions that optimizes retention of learning. It is recommended to schedule short learning sessions multiple times a week, rather than a long session once a week as might commonly be done with more traditional educational models.

The videos allow regular **review** and overlearning of key concepts, and the individual learner can feel in control of the learning. If they want to go over a specific learning point again, or remind themselves of previous learning, they can do this without difficulty. This is especially important if there are significant gaps between learning sessions.

The programme takes a clear approach to **irregular words**. It introduces them very gradually, providing reassurance and guidance on how they can best be approached, e.g. showing the fact that parts of these words **are** regular and **can** be decoded, whilst also showing the irregular parts and suggesting clear strategies for reading or spelling these words.

5. Using the Structured Literacy Videos with an Adult Learner

Getting Started

All that is needed to engage with the programme's videos is a device like a mobile phone, tablet, or laptop. Paper and pen will also be useful to practice the spelling components. The program is free, and there are no logins or passwords to remember.

As a tutor working with dyslexic adults, it will be important to assess a student's current reading and spelling abilities to identify any gaps or areas of difficulty, and then to advise where the learner might best start accessing the videos. The scope and sequence of key learning points (see next page), and the words that are 'unlocked' at each level, can be used to structure an assessment of where the starting point should be for each learner.

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Review of Previous Learning

In each session with an adult learner, it is important to review the key learning covered in the previous session. The structured and cumulative nature of the programme can support this.

Also, if an individual learner has undertaken independent learning between tutoring sessions, it is important to check their understanding and to review key teaching points. This is also an opportunity to celebrate progress and provide reassurance if there have been difficulties or if progress is not as swift as might be hoped.

Independent Learning Between Sessions

As set out above, in terms of scheduling learning sessions, learning is more likely to be retained if the learner is accessing the video lessons more than once a week. For this reason, encouraging and acknowledging learning done between time spent with the tutor is very important.

There is significant research to back up the effectiveness of such an approach (often referred to as 'distributed practice' in scientific literature). So, doing work at home independently throughout the week, along with expert tuition and empathetic support, provides a way to optimize the chances of making significant progress.

Providing Reassurance and Highlighting Progress

Going back to the building blocks of literacy can sometimes be daunting for an adult learner, and the role of the tutor can be as much about supporting confidence and self-esteem as it is about providing skilled learning support.

A tutor can explain the value of addressing learning gaps, provide clarification of teaching points, help the learner reflect on progress made, and also celebrate successes with completion of each level and with the progression of skills development.

The tutor can also signpost additional or subsequent learning opportunities when appropriate as a learner completes the advanced levels of the programme. For example, the Turning Pages reading scheme is an excellent resource. Also, there could be local classes and courses that may be of interest to the learner.
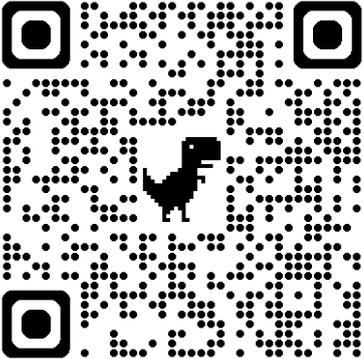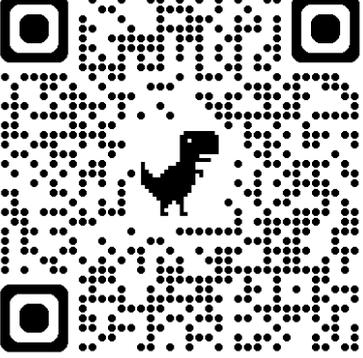
6. Concluding Comments

This guide has been kept intentionally short because the Structured Literacy videos are designed to provide all the teaching resources required, without the need for any extensive manual or teaching guide.

We would encourage you to begin by watching the brief introductory video that provides an overview of the Structured Literacy section of the Adult Dyslexia Hub and explains the theory behind the programme, covering similar topics as included in this brief written guide.
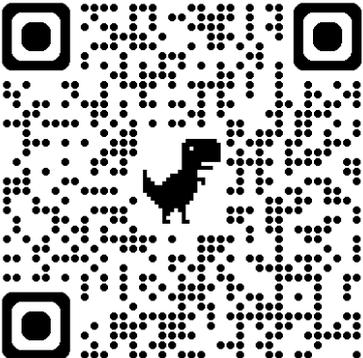
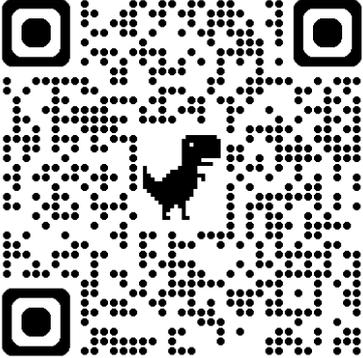We hope you find these resources helpful for you and your learners. Best of luck!

7. Websites and Resources

Resource	Website	QR Code to Scan
Structured Literacy Videos	https://adultdyslexiahub.ie/structured-literacy/	
Adult Dyslexia Hub	https://adultdyslexiahub.ie/	
Voices of Dyslexia	https://adultdyslexiahub.ie/voices-of-dyslexia/	

Ladder of Reading and Writing	https://nancyyoung.ca/the-ladder-of-reading-writing/	
Simple View of Reading	https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/074193258600700104	
Scarborough's Reading Rope	https://dyslexiaida.org/scarboroughs-reading-rope-a-groundbreaking-infographic/	

Turning Pages	https://www.shannontrust.org.uk/our-learning-programmes	
Introductory Video	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmRxCsRVVmo	
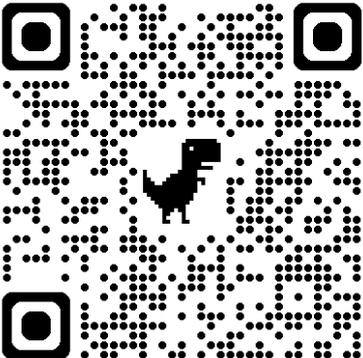
**A huge thank you
to everyone involved
in making this booklet!**