



**Deborah Chetcuti
Ruth Falzon
Stephen Camilleri**

d pebble in my shoe

**teenagers' experiences
of dyslexia and
examinations**

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of dyslexia and examinations

Deborah Chetcuti

Ruth Falzon

Stephen Camilleri

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To all students with dyslexia
who have struggled
with examinations
at one time or another

Acknowledgments

The three narratives in this book are based on the experiences of eight teenagers with a profile of dyslexia.

We are grateful to them for their time, honesty, trust and invaluable insights.

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Ready, steady, go! Racing with a pebble in my shoe

If you are a teenager with a profile of dyslexia and are finishing secondary or post-secondary school you are about to face one of the biggest challenges in your life. As a student you will probably be sitting for formal examinations that will determine your future opportunities such as whether you can continue your studies or your career choice. This may be a daunting prospect and you might be nervous and anxious about your performance in these examinations. You know that all students find examinations hard but for you they are more challenging as your dyslexia hinders you from giving your best.

If you are a teenager with a profile of dyslexia and are about to sit for your examinations, then this book is for you. In this book you will find the stories of three fictional characters: Mark, Sarah and Alex. These teenagers, who have a profile of dyslexia, will share with you their experiences of examinations. You will run with them the examinations race. You will find out how examinations affected them. You will learn about the support systems they managed to find. You will explore with them how examinations can be made fairer.

The stories that you will be reading in this book are based on the real experiences of eight teenagers with a profile of dyslexia. These eight teenagers were between 16 and 18 years old and had just sat for either their secondary level or the matriculation certificate examinations when they were interviewed. For ethical reasons and to ensure confidentiality we have chosen to narrate their stories through the voices of Mark, Sarah and Alex.

ready, steady, go!

Each chapter in the book starts with the stories of Mark, Sarah and Alex, followed by some of our own reflections on these stories. If you too share a profile of dyslexia you will find some useful tips that can help you cope with the challenges you are facing as you approach your examinations.

This book is written for you, a teenager about to sit for examinations. However, you might like to show it to your parents, guardians or caregivers, your teachers or your friends. It might help them understand better what you are going through. It might also motivate them to find ways in which they can help and support you.

Throughout the book we have used the metaphor of 'a pebble in your shoe'. 'a pebble' is the 'dyslexia' that is hidden but which makes running the examination race more uncomfortable, possibly frustrating and perhaps something that can stop you from finishing the race.

d pebble in my shoe

Through the stories of Mark, Sarah and Alex we hope that you will gain some insights into how to manage running the examinations race with the pebble in your shoe. The stories shared will show you that you are not alone and that other teenagers have experienced what you are going through. We hope that this will empower you to make it to the finishing line.

Deborah Chetcuti

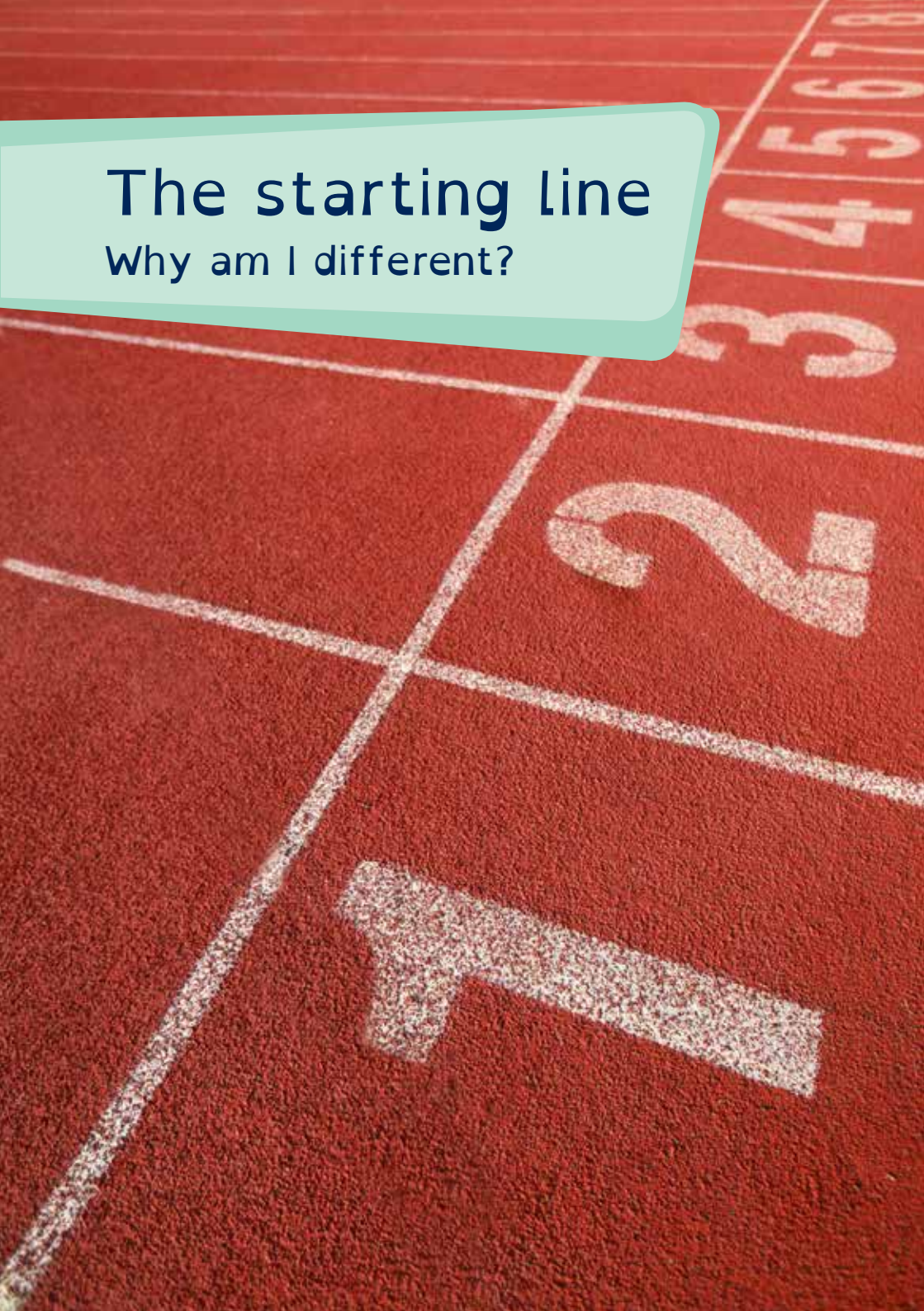
Ruth Falzon

Stephen Camilleri

July 2016

The starting line

Why am I different?





The starting line: Why am I different?

We would like to begin by introducing you to Mark, Sarah and Alex. They are three teenagers aged 16 to 18 years and they all have a profile of dyslexia. Throughout the book, you will be reading about their views and experiences of examinations.

Examinations are hard and have an impact on the lives of all teenagers. However, the effects of examinations are magnified for students like Mark, Sarah and Alex who start off the examinations race at a disadvantage. As you engage with their stories you will also find some of our own reflections on their experiences. This will enable you to gain some insights into the challenges they face.

Mark's story

I am dyslexic. For me this means having trouble processing the written or spoken word.

I love reading and spend hours on end pouring over a good book. However, I used to dread the moment a teacher would ask me to read out loud in class. I used to be petrified, my hands would become clammy and I would become flustered. It's not that I couldn't read but every so often I would mistake one letter for another or start stammering as I struggled to read a word. When the ordeal was over, a wave of relief would come over me.

Another thing I hated was being separated from the rest of the class. One time the teacher made me sit in a row with other students who had difficulties. It was terrible. Granted that I may have needed some extra help, but all I wanted to do was sit with the rest of my classmates. By isolating me from the rest of the class, my

teacher changed the way I looked at myself. It also affected my social interactions with other children. The embarrassment these experiences caused are something I can never forget and have led me to constantly struggle with my self-esteem.

**“I know I am different
but all I want is to be
treated the same
as my classmates.”**



Sarah's story

I found out that I was dyslexic when I was 11 years old. My teachers used to think that I was a slow learner. I always knew that I was different. But before I was assessed and told that I was dyslexic, I used to think that I was stupid. Although I studied very hard I never got high marks. I used to study with my mother, and my younger brother would be next to us. I used to get very upset because my mother would ask me a question and my brother would answer it before me. He was younger than me, but he always seemed to know more than me.

When I was assessed and it turned out that I was dyslexic my friends found out about it. They turned against me and no one wanted to be friends with me anymore. They used to think that I was sick and it used to hurt me. I used to hear them whispering about me. They used to tell me that I was disabled. It made me cry.

“When my friends found out I was dyslexic no one wanted to be friends with me anymore.”

Alex's story

I am dyslexic and my dyslexia affects my spelling and writing and remembering things. I am also very creative and very good at Art and at solving problems.

Not everyone understands the challenges I face with my dyslexia. When I was younger I had a teacher who didn't understand me. She put me at the back of the class and used to ignore me. I remember that we used to have a star chart in our class and all the other children had five stars and I had nothing. This really used to hurt me. Once we had a test and we had to study the multiplication tables. I really studied and tried

my best but I did not do well. When the teacher gave us the test back, she threw my copybook on the desk and told me that I hadn't studied for the test. She did this in front of the whole class and I felt really upset and humiliated. I felt as if I was nothing.

**“Not everyone understands
the challenges I face
with my dyslexia.”**

Everyday challenges

Mark, Sarah and Alex describe a number of everyday challenges experienced by students with a profile of dyslexia. These include:

- Feelings of embarrassment and humiliation.
- Panic attacks when being asked to read out loud in class.
- Feelings of hurt when being labelled by friends.
- Feelings of low self-esteem.
- Feeling less than other children.
- Feelings of not being understood by teachers.

From these experiences you can see that a common characteristic of teenagers with a profile of dyslexia is a sense of not being understood. Mark, Sarah and Alex know that they think and process things differently.

They also know that they are clever and are hurt when friends and teachers do not understand them.

d pebble in my shoe

If like Mark, Sarah and Alex you have had any of these feelings, you need to learn how to find strategies that will help you overcome your embarrassment and build confidence in yourself.

Channel your energy into dealing effectively with the challenges rather than worrying about what others will think of you.



**The pebble
in my shoe**
What is dyslexia?



The pebble in my shoe: What is dyslexia?

We would also like to help you understand what dyslexia is.

Dyslexia is usually associated with challenges related to reading, writing and spelling. There may also be difficulties with auditory, short-term memory and sequencing of ideas.

On the positive side, teenagers with dyslexia may have a number of skills and talents that include: big-picture thinking, problem solving and lateral thinking abilities, a good idea of how things work, creativity, originality and well developed visual spatial skills.

Mark's definition

Some consider dyslexia to be a learning disability. For me dyslexia is not a disability, it is a different way of thinking. Dyslexia is when a person has difficulty processing the written or spoken word. It is primarily related to language, however it might also affect the way one processes numbers and one's ability to complete mathematical tasks within a short period of time.

Alex's definition

When you're dyslexic your brain works differently from that of other teenagers. Some people might think that dyslexia is a disability, but for me dyslexia is not a question of ability or disability. There are the negatives to it and there are the positives. On the negative side dyslexia affects my spelling and handwriting. On the positive side, I am highly creative, I love solving problems and I excel in Art.

Sarah's definition

For me dyslexia means having difficulties with reading and writing. However I do not look at the negative side. I try to look at dyslexia from a positive side. I think that because of my dyslexia I can think out of the box. I can look inside things and not just consider the superficial side of things. For example, if you give someone a computer, they will probably just look at it and think that they have a screen and a keyboard in front of them. I see the inside of the computer, I see how it is wired, how things are connected and in my mind I have already visualised all the different things going on inside the computer. I have a different way of looking at things and it helps me to solve problems in a way that other teenagers do not even dream about.

Some characteristics of dyslexia

Mark, Sarah and Alex describe some of the common characteristics of dyslexia. These characteristics include:

Challenges

Phonological skills
Reading
Sequencing of ideas
Short term memory
Rapid naming
Perception
Movement
Sequencing
Speed of processing

Positive skills

Big-picture thinking
Problem solving
Lateral thinking
Originality
Creativity
Unusual solutions
Visual spatial skills
Intuitions
Understanding how things work

the pebble in my shoe

Now you know that as a teenager with a profile of dyslexia you have both a number of challenges as well as a number of positive skills.

You can focus on how you can overcome your challenges and use your positive skills to pass your examinations.

Although you may be sensitive, you may also build resilience.





Taking part in the race

**How do examinations
affect me?**



Taking part in the race: How do examinations affect me?

Part of any educational system is related to the evaluation of the learning process. While different forms of assessment are available for teachers and examining boards, examinations tend to be the preferred mode.

Indeed, one of the major challenges that you will face as a teenager with a profile of dyslexia is the high-stakes examinations at the end of your secondary and post-secondary schooling. The feelings you associate with examinations may be quite upsetting because you think that no matter how hard you try you can never show your true potential.

Mark's story

Examinations have a great impact on my life. I know that because of my dyslexia I can never achieve my full potential. One of my greatest disappointments in the last year was the fact that I did not manage to pass my English Intermediate examination. I know that I am fluent in English and my teacher always told me that my essays were very creative. Yet, because of my spelling, I did not pass my English examination.

I was utterly devastated because I felt that the examination was a barrier rather than a way of proving my worth. I felt upset that all the effort I had put into my studies were valued by the grade on a single examination, a grade that did not reflect my real competence.

I was angry with the examiners. I wanted to shout at them and tell them that the mark they had given me had completely destroyed my self-

esteem. It made me feel useless and worthless and I felt like giving up on education altogether.

“I just wonder how many great minds are lost simply because the type of intelligence and ideas they have are not the ones that the examiners want.”

Sarah's story

Examinations scare me. I always think that I am not going to pass and the pressure gets to me.

When I am preparing for an examination I try to calm down myself by running around the house chewing gum. I cry because I think that I'm not going to pass. I don't sleep at night and wake up thinking that I will blank out during

the examinations. Every time I think about examinations I get the shivers.

I am afraid because I think that people are going to judge me on the basis of the grades I get in my examinations. I know that I am intelligent and creative, but somehow this never shows up in my examination results. I start thinking that when people see my grades they will think that I am not clever enough. I get depressed because I feel that I am never going to succeed.

“I know I am intelligent and creative, but somehow this never shows up in my examination results.”

Alex's story

Examinations make me very anxious. I get very upset because the examinations never show what I really know. They don't reflect all that I would have studied and learned. I know that if I deserve a grade B, I will only get a C. I am always at a disadvantage. I know right from the start that because of my dyslexia I will never do as well as I deserve.

I know that in spite of all the effort and study I put in throughout the years, my result will ultimately depend on my performance during a three-hour examination. This scares me as everyone has a bad day and everyone makes mistakes. I make even more mistakes because of my dyslexia and this affects my grade. I get very worried because I know that my performance in the examination is going to affect my whole life. People will judge me on my grades and if I don't manage to pass my examinations, I will not be able to pursue the career of my dreams.

“Without good examination results I will miss out on opportunities because I will not have the necessary qualifications.”

Some negative effects of examinations

Examinations can have a great influence on your life because they...

- affect your future and determine career options;
- create stress and anxiety;
- develop in you a fear of failure;
- do not show your true potential;
- do not reflect all your hard work;
- affect your self-esteem;
- influence whether people will employ you;
- assess primarily the areas which you find challenging;
- do not assess your positive skills.

If you allow it, examinations can take over your life. They create stress and anxieties that inevitably will make you do even more mistakes in your examinations. Studies have shown that the higher the anxiety, the lower the performance in examinations.

d pebble in my shoe

You can overcome your anxiety by de-stressing through sports, a hobby, or joining a group where you can meet other students.

You can embrace a more positive outlook by re-thinking the value that examinations have in your life when compared to your true potential and personality. They are but a tiny fraction of a beautiful whole. When you look in the mirror who do you see?



Stumbling along

**How does my dyslexia
affect my performance
in examinations?**



Stumbling along: How does my dyslexia affect my performance in examinations?

You might be wondering why a profile of dyslexia does not allow you to perform at your best during examinations. After all, you are only one of the many teenagers running the examinations race. Your teachers and friends tell you that examinations are hard for everyone and that everyone gets nervous before examinations.

You know that this is true. You also know however that examinations tend to be more challenging because of your dyslexia. You are running the examinations race with the pebble in your shoe.

Mark's story

The main thing that really affects me because of my dyslexia is the time limit of the examination. This is something I struggle with.

From my experience I know that when I work out past papers at home, I am calm and manage to work out the questions without making many mistakes. However, I have noticed that when I am in the actual examination room with a time limit, I do not perform as well. I become tense and flustered and at times I read questions incorrectly. Hence I end up giving wrong answers.

I also tend to leave the last question out. This is not because I do not know the answer, but because I simply do not have enough time to finish. It feels like a race against time and because I am hurrying I make even more mistakes. My handwriting also becomes rather untidy.

“Examinations are a race against time and the quality of my answers suffers.”

Sarah's story

The way in which examination papers are set affects my performance in examinations. Sometimes the questions are written in a complicated way and I don't understand what the examiners expect of me. It's not that I wouldn't know the answer; it's just that I wouldn't have understood what was being asked. To make matters worse, sometimes the questions are so long and winding that it takes me forever to read them through. This affects my understanding.

The questions are also normally printed on white paper and this makes it more difficult for me

to read. Again, I find it hard to read when the printing is too small and crammed.

“Sometimes questions are written in a complicated way and I don’t understand what answer the examiners are expecting from me.”

Alex’s story

My dyslexia hinders me in the examination because I read the question wrongly. This has happened to me many times. One such occasion was when we had a Physics test at school. When the teacher showed me my paper I couldn’t believe it. I had lost 20 marks simply because I had misread a question. The question should have read ‘not using this theory’ and I

stumbling along

had read it 'using this theory'. What I had written down was perfect, but it didn't answer this question. My teacher was very apologetic since he knew that I had written a perfect answer, but he couldn't even give me a single mark for it.

**“I misread questions
and this leads me to give
wrong answers.”**

The challenges experienced because of dyslexia

Mark, Sarah and Alex recalled some challenges they encountered during examinations due to their dyslexia. These included:

- reading questions incorrectly;
- being penalised because of their spelling;
- untidy handwriting that was hard to read;
- lack of comprehension of the text;
- incomplete work.

Time appears to be an important factor during examinations. Having more time will allow you to read questions properly and understand them well. As a result, you will answer questions more calmly and with fewer mistakes. It will also allow you to finish all the questions in the examination paper.

You can request extra time from examination boards. Even if this may not improve your

stumbling along

performance, knowing that you have more time to finish your examination will relieve some of the stress and anxiety.

To mitigate some of the issues related to spelling in language learning you could learn a number of strategies that will improve your vocabulary.

These include:

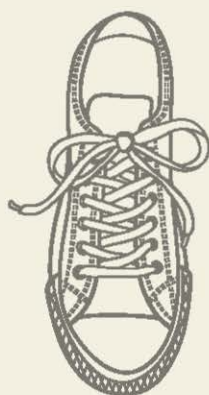
- keeping a spelling notebook to write down words you use often;
- writing down words on flashcards to visualise how the words are written;
- using little tricks to jog your memory (for instance, to remember the difference between 'here' and 'hear' you think about 'h... ear' and remember 'ear' when you want to write 'hear' meaning to listen to).

Planning in advance an answer and checking the logical sequence of the various stages is another important strategy that can help students with a profile of dyslexia.



Intense training

**What help can I find
when preparing for
examinations?**



Intense training: What help can I find when preparing for examinations?

The most important thing about the examinations race is getting to the finishing line and crossing it successfully. To be able to do this, you need help and support from parents, guardians or caregivers, teachers, friends and even examination boards.

Success also depends on the development of practical study skills that make your learning easier. Moreover, having a positive attitude towards studying and examinations will enable you to improve your confidence.

Mark's story

When I was studying for my examinations my parents really helped me. While I did most of my studying on my own, in some subjects my mother would study with me and help me to focus. I know that I am lucky because I have parents who understand me. They know how to help me and have given me certain tips and tricks on how to answer examination questions that I have found useful over the years. I would have found it harder to succeed without the help of my parents.

Some of my teachers were very helpful. They used to encourage me so I do not give up. One of my English teachers was very considerate. She used to constantly tell me not to give up, that I was improving and that she knew that I was doing my best. While this might seem to be something trivial, for me it was valuable. It might not have helped to improve my grade in English, but it gave me self-confidence.

intense training

I also worked hard to prepare myself for my examinations. I developed my own method of studying. I learned how to study on my own, although sometimes I still needed my mother's help. I used to write my own short notes. Hence, before the examination itself I would only read these short notes. This helped me not to be overwhelmed by the amount of material I had to cover for the examination.

“The encouraging words of my parents and teachers helped me to prepare myself better for examinations.”

Sarah's story

I always study with my mother. She sits down next to me and together we read my notes and textbooks. She also painstakingly prepares flash cards with key words in the different subjects so I

can remember them easily. She is very supportive and patient when helping me to read difficult words. Together we draw mind maps that help me remember how things are structured and connected to each other. My mother is my rock. She is always going to meetings to learn about new ways in which she can help me.

I also had a teacher who used to tutor me on an individual basis. She used to teach me how to focus. Moreover, the fact that she could give me individual attention was something important for me. I liked the individual attention, because I am very shy. In class I don't speak up because I am afraid of making a mistake. On the other hand, with my tutor I felt safe enough to be myself.

When studying for my examinations, I found that watching videos and clips on YouTube helped me. For example, I watched a film version of one of the books we were reading at that time. I read the book but then seeing it on the screen helped me to visualise the words. When I had to write

an essay about the book, I remembered the scenes in the film and I knew immediately what I needed to write.

“Visualising things through mind maps and watching films helped me remember facts.”

Alex's story

I had a lot of help at home. My father used to help me all the time. The school notes were too long. He would read them for me and we would write a shorter version that I could use on my own. My father also found time to listen to all my frustrations and he supported me emotionally.

One of my teachers was also very understanding and accommodating. She knew a lot about dyslexia and used to give me handouts instead

of just asking me to copy from the board. She also used to present me with colourful notes and I would print them. She always answered all my questions patiently.

When writing notes I preferred to use coloured pens. I highlighted the important text and keywords. When I wanted to remember a concept I used photographs and pictures as prompts to jog my memory. Then, during the examination I visualised the colours and the pictures, and this helped me to remember.

“Using coloured pens and highlighting text and keywords helped me study better.”

Some tips to help you prepare for examinations

Mark, Sarah and Alex developed individualised strategies to cope with the challenges of examinations. Some of these might help you too.

On a personal level:

- Study with your parents, guardians and caregivers. They can be great study-buddies.
- Get individualised tutoring if you think you need the individual attention.
- Work with your teachers. Tell them about your challenges and negotiate ways in which they can help.
- Develop an individualised study plan that works for you.
- Use colours and highlighters when writing your own notes.
- Find videos and animations to help you visualise facts.

d pebble in my shoe

- Develop mind maps that will help you remember concepts.
- Talk to your parents, guardians or caregivers and teachers about the challenges you are facing. This will help you relieve some of the stress.

Before the race

What help can I get from examination boards?





Before the race: What help can I get from examination boards?

Normally, examination boards provide students with a profile of dyslexia with examination access arrangements (EAAs). These examination access arrangements are provided to compensate for some of the challenges you might face because of your dyslexia. They can include: extra time; a reader to read the questions; a scribe to write down answers; a prompter to keep you focused; and the use of a computer.

In order to be eligible for these examination access arrangements you need to be assessed by a professional such as a psychologist or a specialist in dyslexia. These assessments have to be carried out at different stages of your education and in advance of the examination itself. It is up to the examination board to decide the kind of accommodation/s you are entitled to.

Mark's story

One of the things that reassures me during the examination, is the knowledge that I have been assigned extra time to properly finish the paper. I found that I did not always need the extra time in all of my examinations. However, having extra time calmed me down since I could work at my own pace. It also gave me a bit more time to revise my work.

“Having extra time helped to calm me down.”



Sarah's story

The most important concession that I was granted by the examination board was being able to use a computer. This was essential, as usually I cannot write neatly and legibly. By using a computer I was sure that examiners would be able to read my answers without penalising me for my poor handwriting.

“Using the computer reassured me that examiners would be able to read my answers.”

Alex's story

I felt rather disappointed when I got to know that the examination board did not grant me all the concessions I applied for. I was worried that

without the concessions I was accustomed to, I would then not pass my examinations.

When I asked why I wasn't granted the access arrangements I felt I was entitled to, I was informed that other students didn't have any help and it would be unfair on them. I don't think this is really true and fair. If I had a visual challenge I would be allowed to use glasses even if not all students are wearing glasses. With dyslexia it's the same thing. You're not giving students with dyslexia any extra advantage when you're providing them with specific accommodations. These are meant to ensure that we can start off at level playing field.

“Access arrangements help you start off at par with other students.”

Examination access arrangements

Alex was very disappointed when he was not granted the examination access arrangements he had requested. Researchers are divided about how effective examination access arrangements are and whether they actually make a difference to your achievement. However, a number of studies have shown that having these arrangements might reduce some of the anxiety you may feel before taking the examination. This suggests that they create at least a supportive positive examinations environment.

Therefore, before sitting for any examination it is important that you:

- familiarise yourself well in advance with the examination access arrangements provided by specific examination boards;
- get assessed by a professional (you will need this if you intend to apply for examination access arrangements);

d pebble in my shoe

- discuss with this professional what examination access arrangements you need;
- be realistic about your requirements and ask only for what you really need;
- use any examination access arrangements given to improve your chances of success.

The finishing line

Towards a fairer
examination system

FINISH



The finishing line: Towards a fairer examination system

At the beginning of this book we invited you to run the examinations race with Mark, Sarah and Alex. We wanted you to get a glimpse of the challenges they had experienced when sitting for their examinations. We tried to offer some advice as to how you could overcome some of these challenges.

We also explained how Mark, Sarah and Alex were running the examinations race with the pebble in their shoe, having dyslexia as part of their profile. Although hidden to others, dyslexia causes so much annoyance, frustration and hurt. Indeed, it may even threaten to keep you from achieving your goal and reaching

the finishing line. We know that the pebble is part of you. It will remain in your shoe as you run the examinations race together with other teenagers who do not have a pebble in their shoe. You might think that this is unfair and that your challenges are keeping you from showing how fast you can really run. You might ask, 'How can this examinations race be made fairer?' and 'What can be done to ensure that despite the pebble in my shoe I can still succeed?'

To answer these questions we sought the opinions of Mark, Sarah and Alex. We asked them to imagine what they would say if they were having a conversation with the head of an examination board. We wanted to listen to their suggestions, their views and opinions. Following trends in current educational research, we believe that there is much to learn from listening to the views of teenagers talking about examinations and the way in which these examinations affected their lives.

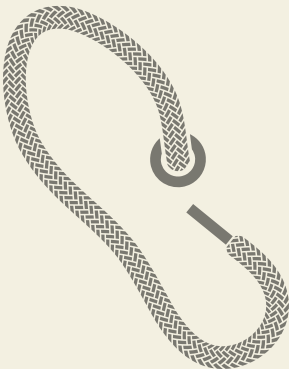
Mark's suggestions

I think that the main focus of assessment should be on learning rather than simply studying for the examination. Sometimes I feel that at school the teachers are just teaching us for the examination. I love the sciences and I am very curious about what is happening around me. I ask many questions and I get very frustrated when the teacher tells me that we are not going to cover something because it is not going to be in the examination. Learning has simply become a means to obtain a grade in an examination. I would like to see examinations change to bring back the joy of learning.

In my opinion you can do this by focusing less on the examination as a set of questions that have to be answered in a fixed time. The examiners can see whether I have understood a topic by assigning me coursework, or allowing me to develop a portfolio. If the traditional examinations are to be kept then there should

be adequate time to allow all students to complete their work. The questions in the examination should also be graded with a mixture of easy and difficult questions. This will help students since at least you come out of the examination feeling that you had managed to work out some of the questions.

“Learning has simply become a means to obtain a grade in an examination. Please change examinations and bring back the joy of Learning for its own sake!”



Sarah's suggestions

I would like to suggest that examination boards allow students to sit for examinations in a friendly environment. When I did my examinations I had to go to a different school. I didn't know this school, the desks were uncomfortable, there was very little light, and I did not know the invigilators. The unfamiliar environment made me feel uneasy and I was not comfortable during the examination. If I had to take examinations in my own school, supervised by teachers from my school, I would be very happy. I know my school, I know the teachers. This would help me keep calm and I think I would do better in my examinations.

Another improvement I would like to suggest is to have a better design of the examination papers. It would be of great help if the paper on which examinations are printed is light yellow instead of white. There is too much of a difference between white and black and the white hurts my

eyes. Another important feature of examination papers is the font and the print. Sometimes the font is so tiny and the words are so crammed together that it becomes even more difficult to read. Having a larger font and spaced out paragraphs would help all students not just those with dyslexia. It would also be helpful if some pictures are included in the paper so that if you get stuck reading, the picture can give you some hints.

I hope that examiners listen to these suggestions. I think that it is important that they see what all students need. This will help them make examinations more teen-friendly.

“Students should be allowed to sit for examinations in their own schools.”

Alex's suggestions

In my view examination boards should employ a number of researchers. These researchers can look into different ways in which students can be assessed. They can develop examinations that suit the needs of all students.

I would like to suggest that in subjects that are not assessing language students should be allowed to express themselves through different mediums. Assessment of students should not only be through writing, but can be through an oral examination, practical assessment, and the use of a computer.

I am very much in favour of oral examinations. For example, English literature can very easily be assessed orally. If the examiner wants to assess whether you have understood the sense of the poem, what the poet wanted to express, and your ability to give a critical analysis of the poem, you can do this orally. You can have a

conversation with the examiner and express your views and opinions much better this way than in writing.

However, an oral examination works best for me and someone else might prefer to write or use a computer. Students should be allowed to choose the way in which they would like to communicate their knowledge.

“Students should be allowed to choose how to communicate their knowledge. They can be examined: orally, in a practical way, or by using a computer.”

Towards a fairer examinations system

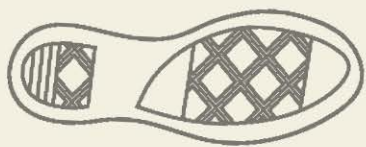
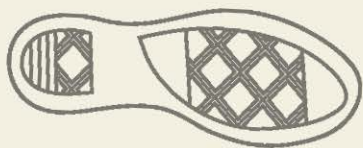
As you read through the suggestions made by Mark, Sarah and Alex and their views on developing a fairer examinations system, you might have thought about some other ideas too.

Talk about these ideas with your peers, teachers and parents, guardians or caregivers. By making your voice heard you are creating awareness and you become an agent of change.

The first step in achieving a fairer examinations system is for you to participate in the debates regarding examinations. Students with a profile of dyslexia have an important voice in this debate. Indeed, you can be part of this movement towards change. You can contribute in your own way to the decisions taken around examinations. While dyslexia can affect your performance in examinations, now is the time for your experiences with dyslexia to affect the examination system.

Crossing the finishing line





Crossing the finishing line

The stories of Mark, Sarah and Alex are based on the experiences of eight teenagers. Notwithstanding the pebble in their shoe, these eight teenagers ultimately did make it to the finishing line. They might not all have obtained the grades they dreamt of and possibly failed some of their attempts, but their determination never faltered. These teenagers are now pursuing their studies and furthering their careers.

We wrote these inspiring stories to help you run the examinations race with hope and optimism. Like the pebble in your shoe, your dyslexia will be part of the race and beyond. You might stumble along, you might need extra support,

it might take longer and possibly be a bit more painful, but in the end you too can make it to the finishing line. Remember that you also have talents, abilities and strong personal qualities that will allow you to develop and realise your true potential.

We would wish you to share these stories together with your stories, with parents, guardians or caregivers, teachers, and people working in examining boards. This could lead to a better understanding of teenagers' experiences with dyslexia in relation to examinations. We hope that these stories, together with your stories, will bring about change. Parents, guardians or caregivers can find suggestions to help them support their children. Teachers can become more considerate towards issues related to students with a profile of dyslexia. Examiners might be able to reassess current assessment practices in order to develop fairer examination systems.

crossing the finishing line

By narrowly focusing on the examinations race related to academic subjects, you might be tempted to believe that marks and grades are the beginning and all, the measure of all things important. However, never forget that life is the one and only race that really matters. In more ways than one, running the examinations race will prepare you for life's journey. Indeed, life's journey towards success is the most important race you will face... with or without the pebble in your shoe.

Examinations play a significant role in the life of all students. Undoubtedly examinations create a lot of stress, and for teenagers with a profile of dyslexia they are even more challenging.

This book narrates the inspiring stories of a group of teenagers who have run the examination race with a pebble in their shoe. Through their narratives you will find out what challenges they faced, how they coped and the support they found in order to succeed.

“I just wonder how many great minds are lost simply because the type of intelligence and ideas they have are not the ones that the examiners want.”

Mark

“Without good examination results I will miss out on opportunities because I will not have the necessary qualifications.”

Sarah

“The encouraging words of my parents and teachers helped me to prepare myself better for examinations.”

Alex

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