



Dyslexia Community of Practice Session 5: The International Dyslexia Association Revised Definition of Dyslexia

Sharon Vaughn & Elizabeth Stevens

January 23, 2026

mimtsstac.org



Presenters:

The content for this training day was developed based on the work of:



Sharon Vaughn, PhD
Professor, The University of Texas at Austin
Executive Director, Meadows Center for Preventing
Educational Risk



Elizabeth Stevens, PhD
Associate Professor, The University of Texas at
Austin



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Training Effectiveness

- At the end of the session, you will be asked to provide feedback on today's training
- Results will be used to make improvements to professional learning and for reporting to TA Center stakeholders
- One of the feedback questions you will see is related to promoting and positively portraying diversity among educators and learners (e.g., focus on asset-based language, positive representation of multiple identities)

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Group Agreements

We are **Responsible**

- Return on time from breaks
- Take care of our needs

We are Engaged

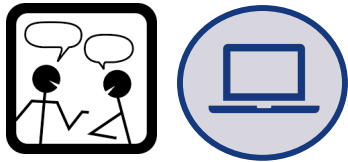
- Share what you know and ask questions
- Plan to participate in multiple ways
 - Chat, breakout rooms, polls, reactions, unmute
 - Ask questions

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We want to hear from you!

We are committed to making this time engaging and meaningful to support your learning as a teacher and coach. When you see these icons, please join in the conversation via the chat or in your breakout sessions.



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MiMTSS Dyslexia CoP Session Schedule

Date	Time	Topic
September 9, 2025	2:00-3:30pm ET	The Neurobiological Underpinnings of Dyslexia
October 7, 2025	10:00-11:30am ET	Misunderstandings of the Science of Reading
November 4, 2025	3:00-4:30pm ET	Structured Literacy
December 3, 2025	11:00am-12:30pm ET	Multisyllabic Word Instruction
→ January 23, 2026	2:00-3:30pm ET	Revised IDA Definition of Dyslexia Part 1
February 23, 2026	10:00-11:30am ET	Revised IDA Definition of Dyslexia Part 2
March 26, 2026	3:00-4:30pm ET	TBD
April 23, 2026	11:00am-12:30pm ET	TBD

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Agenda

2:00-2:10	Welcome and check-in on Session 4 ★
2:10-2:50	Content presentation
2:50-3:10	Application activity
3:10-3:20	Debrief application activity as a whole group
3:20-3:30	Wrap up (i.e., answer follow-up questions, review resources, set goals for applying lessons learned, preview next session)

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Objectives

1	2	3	4
Identify the key components in the revised IDA 2025 definition of dyslexia	Explain why these components are critical in defining dyslexia (e.g., difficulty in spelling)	Explain how dyslexia manifests differently based on the orthography of the language	Explain how the revised definition helps parents, teachers, researchers, and people with lived experience.

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A brief recap of session 4: Multisyllable word reading instruction

Reading by
analogy

Chunking

Webs or word
maps

Syllable types
(e.g., open,
closed)

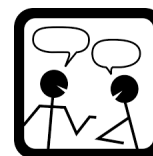
Morphology
(e.g., prefixes,
suffixes, roots)

Routine (e.g.,
Overt or covert
strategy)

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In the chat: Share one "big takeaway" you learned from session 4 (multisyllable word reading).



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The International Dyslexia Association Revised Definition of Dyslexia

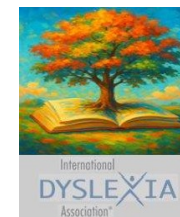
Special Recognition to: International Dyslexia Association, and Charles W. Haynes¹, R. Malatesha Joshi², Hugh Catts³, Juan F. Quiñonez Beltrán², Jialin Lai⁴

¹MGH Institute of Health Professions, Boston, MA, USA.

²Texas A & M University, College Station, TX, USA.

³Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL, USA.

⁴Augusta University, Augusta, GA, USA



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Special Acknowledgements

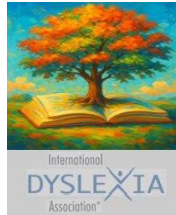
Josh Clark, Sonja Banks and **Carolyn Cowen** for their vision as well as grant and logistical support.

Tim Odegard for editorship of Annals and allowing use/adaptation of several of our introductory slides.

Tracy Weeden and Neuhaus Center leadership for their hosting our Summit.

The **IDA Dyslexia Definition Steering Committee** members for their time, efforts and insights.

Dyslexia Definition **Advisors Group** and **dyslexia community members** for their thoughtful responses to the three iterations of the definition.



Let's see what we know!

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< MI Dyslexia IDA revised definition Session 5

Visual settingsEdit

When poll is active respond at PollEv.com/elizabethste773

4. Most students with dyslexia also have reading comprehension problems.  0



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2. Dyslexia is a condition that occurs across all orthographies.  0

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3. Dyslexia is inherited. 0

True

False

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When poll is active respond at PollEv.com/elizabethste773



4. Most students with dyslexia also have reading comprehension problems. 0

True

False

MI Dyslexia IDA revised definition Session 5

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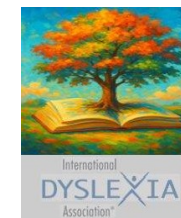


5. Students with dyslexia have special gifts or talents. 0

True

False

Now let's look at the IDA 2025 definition of dyslexia...



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IDA Definition of Dyslexia 2025

"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along a continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual's peers. The causes of dyslexia are complex and involve combinations of genetic, neurobiological, and environmental influences that interact throughout development. Underlying difficulties with phonological and morphological processing are common but not universal, and early oral language weaknesses often foreshadow literacy challenges. Secondary consequences include reading comprehension problems and reduced reading and writing experience that can impede growth in language, knowledge, written expression, and overall academic achievement. Psychological well-being and employment opportunities also may be affected. Although identification and targeted instruction are important at any age, language and literacy support before and during the early years of education is particularly effective."

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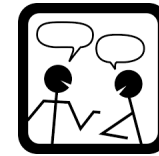


Words to consider in the definition:

*"Dyslexia is a **specific learning disability** characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along a continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual's peers."*

Write in the chat:

Why do you think **specific learning disability** is used to identify students with dyslexia?



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Words to consider in the definition:

*"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve **accuracy, speed, or both** and vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along a continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual's peers."*

Note:

Think about how we can use **ORF** to determine accuracy, speed, or both.



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Words to consider in the definition:

*"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and **vary depending on the orthography**. These difficulties occur along a continuum of severity and persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual's peers."*

Write in the chat:

Why might **orthography** influence dyslexia symptoms?



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Words to consider in the definition:

*"Dyslexia is a specific learning disability characterized by difficulties in word reading and/or spelling that involve accuracy, speed, or both and vary depending on the orthography. These difficulties occur along **a continuum of severity** and **persist even with instruction that is effective for the individual's peers**.*

Consider the students with whom you work. How do their word reading and/or spelling difficulties present as part of this continuum?



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How is dyslexia defined in Michigan law?

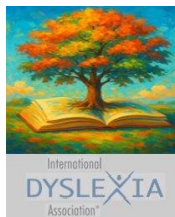
Michigan Dyslexia Handbook (Version 1.1)
February 2025 www.michigan.gov/mde

"Dyslexia" means both of the following:

- (i) A specific learning disorder that is neurobiological in origin and characterized by difficulties with accurate or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities that 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.
- (ii) A specific learning disorder that may include secondary consequences, such as problems in reading comprehension and a reduced reading experience that can impede the growth of vocabulary and lead to social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties.

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Why revisit the definition?



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A Definition of Dyslexia

G. Reid Lyon

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
National Institutes of Health,
Bethesda, Maryland

Sally E. Shaywitz
Bennett A. Shaywitz

Yale University School of Medicine
New Haven, Connecticut

In addition to the authors, members of the working group of the International Dyslexia Association included Susan Brady, Hugh Catts, Emerson Dickman, Guinevere Eden, Jack Fletcher, Jeffrey Gilger, Robin Morris, Harley Tomey, and Thomas Viall.

This paper elaborates on the components of a working definition of developmental dyslexia. It follows the general format of a paper by Lyon published in *Annals of Dyslexia* in 1995, which elaborated on a working definition proposed in 1994 (Lyon, 1995). The current definition agreed on by the work group updates and expands on the working definition from 1994.

Annals of Dyslexia, Vol. 53, 2003
Copyright ©2003 by The International Dyslexia Association®
ISSN 0736-9587

(Lyon, Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2003)

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"But the task is not complete. Our understanding of dyslexia is a work in progress and will continue to be just that One constant is that this and future definitions reflect the best that science has to offer."

Recent *Annals of Dyslexia* articles critical of the 2002 definition

Dyslexia in the 21st Century: Revisiting the Consensus Definition. Tim Odegard, et al.

Revisiting the Definition of Dyslexia. Hugh Catts, Nicole Patton Terry, Christopher J. Peterson, Laura M. Steacy, Kelly Farquharson, & Yaacov Petscher

Towards a Dynamic, Comprehensive Conceptualization of Dyslexia. Maryanne Wolf, Patricia Kover, Laura V. Rhinehart, Maria Luisa Gorno Tempini, & Sue Sears

The Critical Role of Instructional Response in Defining and Identifying Students with Dyslexia: A Case for Updating Existing Definitions. Sharon Vaughn, Jeremy Miciak, Nathan Clemens, & Jack M. Fletcher

An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Strengths and Weaknesses of the International Dyslexia Association Definition of Dyslexia. Brian Gearin, Jessica Turtura, Kim Anderson, Samatha Durrance, Joan Mele-McCarthy, Laura Schultz, & Karleen Spitulnik

Dyslexia in the Twenty-First Century: A Commentary on the IDA Definition of Dyslexia. Maggie Snowling & Charles Hulme

Dyslexia in the Twenty-First Century: A Commentary on the IDA Definition of Dyslexia. Julian G. Elliott & Elena L. Grigorenko

Thoughts on the Definition of Dyslexia. Linda Siegel, David Hurford, Jamie Metsala, et al.

**** In our next session we will address Q&A in depth and highlight "The Critical Role of Instructional Response in Defining and Identifying Dyslexia"**

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Working definition

The 2002 revision was considered a "working definition"

As knowledge was gained from research and practice, it would need to be revised

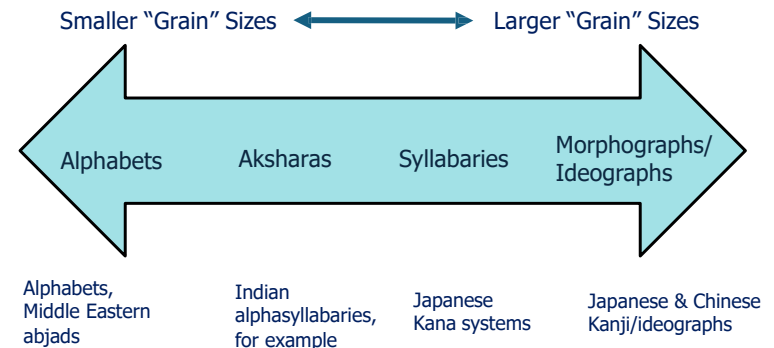
In the past 23 years, considerable evidence from both science and practice has advanced our understanding of dyslexia

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How does orthography influence dyslexia identification?

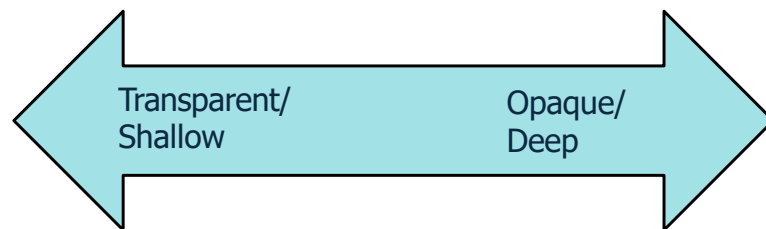
Units of Orthographic Representation



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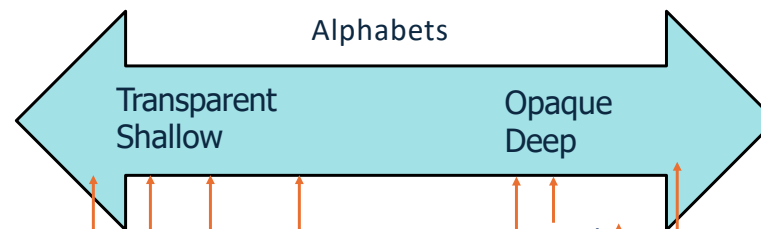
Orthography Transparency



More ← → Less

Consistency between written language units and spoken language units

Transparency of Orthography

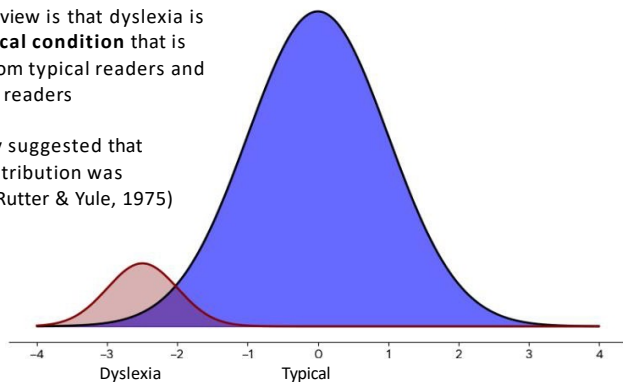


Finnish
Italian
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Danish
English

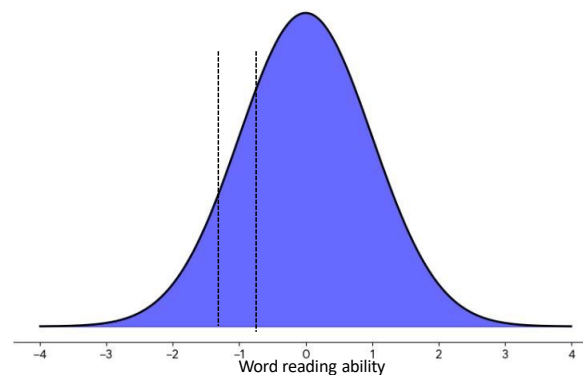
Dimensional Model

Traditional view is that dyslexia is a **categorical condition** that is **distinct** from typical readers and other poor readers

Early study suggested that reading distribution was **bimodal** (Rutter & Yule, 1975)



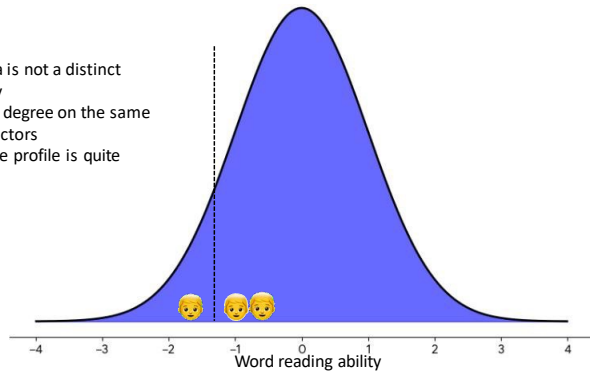
Unidimensional Model



(Catts et al., 2009; Shaywitz et al., 1992)

Unidimensional Model

- Dyslexia is not a distinct category
- Differ in degree on the same set of factors
- Cognitive profile is quite variable



Neurobiological Basis

Genetic studies have uncovered **numerous genes** associated with dyslexia; Candidate genes are **not specific to dyslexia**, and for the most part, have been in the human genome for thousands of years

The impact of genes on brain development and reading outcomes is **not deterministic**; rather it is **probabilistic** and is the product of dynamic developmental processes involving genes and an expanding range of environmental influences

Disruptions in brain processes are **more continuous than discrete** (fall along a continuum) and there is an overlap in the presence of these disruptions in those with dyslexia and those with typical reading

Currently, neuroscience is unable to provide us with **definitive brain-based markers** of dyslexia

(Dobrynin et al., 2025; Doust et al., 2022; Gaab & Duggan, 2024; Grigorenko, 2022; Mountford et al., 2025; Soheili-Nezhad, 2024; Stiles, 2017)



Cognitive Profile of Dyslexia

Previous definition recognized a **phonological processing deficit** as the primary causal factor of dyslexia

Ability to **store, retrieve, and reflect on** the sounds of language impact the ease of mapping symbols onto sounds

But research examining individual cases has shown that a phonological processing deficit is **not necessary or sufficient cause**

Research has also documented **additional causal factors**

(Catts et al., 2017; Hulme et al., 2015; Obrien & Yeatman, 2022; Pennington et al., 2012; Ramus et al., 2013; Scarborough, 2001)



Multifactorial Causal Models of Dyslexia

Multiple causal factors add and interact to result in dyslexia

Phonological processing deficit may be a major causal factor, but other factors operate in combination with it, and in some cases, in place of it to increase the likelihood of dyslexia

Better explains the complex interaction between environmental factors and the multiple genes involved - polygenetic

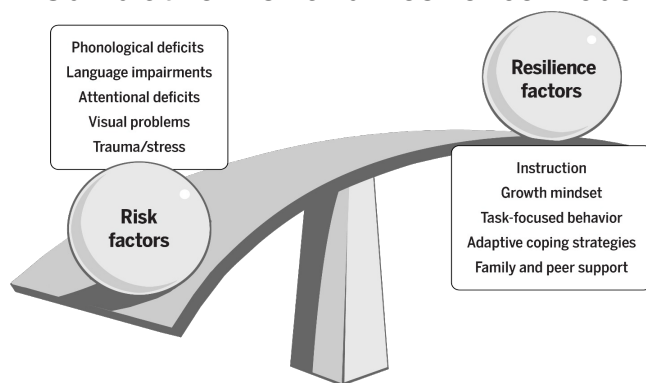
Probabilistic rather than deterministic

Not just deficits; children with the same level of deficits often show divergent outcomes because of varying levels of resilience

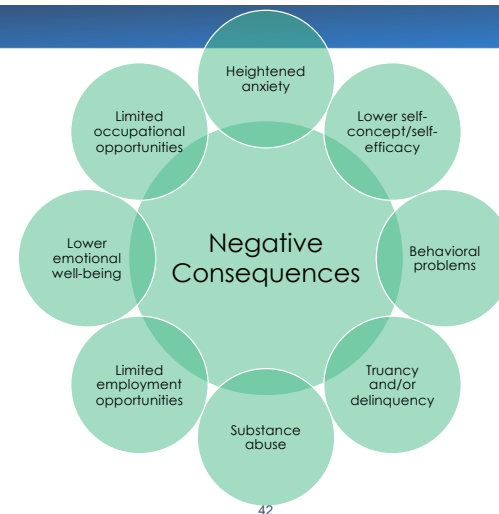
(Catts & Adlof, 2011; Catts & Petscher, 2022; McGrath et al., 2019; O'Brien & Yeatman, 2020; Pennington, 2006; Ring & Black, 2018; Snowling, 2012; Van Bergen et al., 2014)



Cumulative Risk and Resilience Model



(Catts & Petscher, 2022 Updated)



(Arnold et al., 2005; Daniel et al., 2006; Grigorenko et al., 2006; Jorden & Dyer, 2017; McArthur et al., 2020; Morgan et al., 2012)

What does the 2025 IDA definition give us?

For **parents and persons with dyslexia**, we hope the definition provides:

Validation

- The definition further confirms that the struggles of persons with dyslexia are *real and not due to the person's lack of effort*.

Perspective and understanding

- Helps parents understand that dyslexia has varied causes and characteristics; does not assign blame

Hope

- Stresses that *early and targeted instruction* works and progress is possible at any age

For **parents and persons with dyslexia**, we hope the definition provides:

Diagnostic precision

- “Accuracy, speed, or both” specifies universal, cross-linguistic features of word-level reading and/or spelling challenges.

Instructional implications

- “persists even with instruction effective for peers” distinguishes learner within school environment and raises question of type(s) of instruction needed.

Linguistic basis

- Underscores links of phonological, morphological, and oral-language skills to literacy growth.

Implications for the whole person

- Notes possible consequences for comprehension, expression, and well-being.

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For **researchers**, the definition offers conceptual depth and continuity:

Integrative framework

- Notes multifactorial genetic, neurobiological, and environmental interactions.

Cross-linguistic scope

- “Vary depending on the orthography” aligns with international reading science.

Dimensional model

- “Continuum of severity” underscores that dyslexic reading/spelling is not separate from other forms of reading

Developmental cascade

- Connects early oral-language weaknesses to later literacy outcomes, further supports longitudinal research questions.

Policy linkage

- Retains “specific learning disability” for consistency with IDEA & WHO frameworks

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Reminder: Our Breakout Room Norms

- Identify the **facilitator** who will lead discussion and keep the group moving forward
- Identify a **notetaker** who will document key ideas and share those with the larger group (in the chart or aloud)
- Identify a **timekeeper** who will keep track of time and support with making sure the group answers all questions



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In your breakout rooms...



We intend to organize your questions about dyslexia into FAQ and address them.

Our next session will highlight how response to intervention and early intervention are the “cornerstones” to mitigating the impact of dyslexia

Use the breakout room time to organize your questions regarding defining and identifying dyslexia- be prepared to post them!

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Let's debrief!

What questions do you have for us related to...

- Lessons learned from today
- Action steps

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More Resources to Explore

Dyslexia in the 21st Century: Revisiting the Consensus Definition.
Tim Odegard, Emily A. Farris, & Anna E. Middleton

Revisiting the ...ttts, Nicole Patton
Terry, Christoph ...n, Richard K.
Wagner, Laura ... Yaacov Petscher

The Critical Role of Instructional Response in Defining and Identifying Students with Dyslexia: A Case for Updating Existing Definitions. Sharon Vaughn, Jeremy Miciak, Nathan Clemens, & Jack M. Fletcher

We will talk about this in Part 2 (February), so read this if you'd like to get a "head start" on the topic!

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What's coming up?

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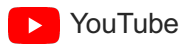
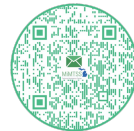
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