

Is dyslexia a gift?



Possible strengths include...

- Visual-spatial talents
- Big-picture thinking
- Entrepreneurial skills
- Seeing connections

I won the 2009 Nobel Prize in Medicine & I have dyslexia.

Dr. Greider

PRO The notion that dyslexia imparts cognitive strengths is a pillar for a movement celebrating dyslexia's **advantages** and asserting that the brains of people with dyslexia are **different, not defective**.

Dyslexia's my superpower.



This premise can be a lifeline of hope for parents and students drowning in the academic challenges that often overwhelm learners with dyslexia. **Hope**—the promise of reaching a distant shore—can make a world of difference.

The parade of **"celebrity dyslexics"** marching through most stories about dyslexia in the popular press helps impart that hope and highlight dyslexia's hypothesized upsides.

CON Not everyone buys the "dyslexia-talent hypothesis." Some argue it's a Pollyanna-ish **myth** that can be **damaging** when expectations of having certain abilities aren't met.

Others question if all or even most people with dyslexia have such talents and point out that for every celebrity with dyslexia, countless people struggle with its **harsh consequences**.

Some assert that early identification and intervention and appropriate accommodations and assistive technology must be **THE focus**. Some worry that stressing *difference vs. disability* threatens enacted **rights** and service **eligibility**.

Still others point out that **empirical/scientific evidence** supporting a talent-dyslexia hypothesis, while intriguing, remains thin. (*So far!*)

Some empirical studies do show certain visual-spatial strengths/processing differences, but it's unclear how much real-world advantage they confer or if they're a *cause or consequence* of reading difficulties.

Hmmm...

And some scholars question if I really had dyslexia.

Which Pros/Cons Resonate Most For You?

PRO 8. Yes!
Positive thinking can impart the will to keep striving & thus improve chances for success

PRO 1. Yes!
The disability paradigm is incomplete; there are myriad examples of talent & dyslexia

CON 7. No!
For some, upside expectations can prove disappointing (*more failure!*); also for every celebrity success story, thousands struggle

CON 2. No!
Empirical evidence is meager; this is just an *illusory correlation* (phenomenon of perceiving false relationships); & any talents develop as defaults since reading-related paths are blocked



PRO 6. Yes!
High profile success stories offer lifelines of hope & evidence of a dyslexia-talent relationship

CON 3. No!
And because illiteracy & academic failure are so harmful, teaching reading & protecting rights/services must be **THE priorities**

CON 5. No!
And print literacy *will* remain a gateway for full participation in society

PRO 4. Yes!
Anyway, technology is making print literacy less vital, maybe moot



1. Dr. Geschwind speculated that the pattern of neural development in dyslexia may reflect a mechanism advantageous to the population as a whole, since it leads to **diversity** and patterns of talent.

2. But we lack the body of empirical **research and evidence** needed to categorically assert there is a dyslexia advantage.



3. On the other hand, as Dr. Sagan said, "Absence of evidence is not evidence of **absence**."

Hmmm

6. Finally, the **environment** often determines if a learning difference is a disability or talent.

5. There are many **myths** about dyslexia, so it's important to get our facts straight—what we do and don't know ... *so far!*



4. So, we don't know for sure if there's a benefit to dyslexia. We do know that **every child** has strengths & affinities that should be nurtured. For those with dyslexia, this may be **vital!**

Learn more about dyslexia

International Dyslexia Association (DyslexiaIDA.org)

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