

There are so many wonderful books on the subjects of dyslexia and ADHD. The Reading Interventionists at Spring Valley are currently reading through *Overcoming Dyslexia* by Sally Shaywitz, M.D., one of the foundational books on this complex subject. I thought I would share a report I recently wrote as an encouragement for all of us in our practice of being life long learners.

*Overcoming Dyslexia, A New and  
Complete Science-Based Program  
for Reading Problems at Any Level*

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*Overcoming Dyslexia, A New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at  
Any Level*

By Sally Shaywitz, M.D.

*Overcoming Dyslexia*, by Sally Shaywitz is considered by many to be the “bible” on the complex issue of dyslexia. Shaywitz covers the intricate nature of reading and dyslexia as well as the details of diagnosing dyslexia. She offers a wealth of ideas for helping children and adults become readers and gives guidance in assisting struggling readers to move toward proficiency and success. Her many uses of personal stories of struggling readers as well as the science behind her beliefs both enliven the text and motivate the educator.

General Content

Shaywitz divides her book into four sections:

1. The Nature of Reading and Dyslexia
  - a. This section outlines the science behind the various facets of dyslexia. From understanding the historical roots to outlining how the working brain reads, this portion of the book leaves one with a deeper understanding of this complex issue.
2. Diagnosing Dyslexia
  - a. Diagnosing dyslexia is discussed and explained in an understandable and concise manner. From childhood to adulthood, in-depth clues about the manifestation of this specific learning disability are explained and illustrated by age.
3. Helping Your Child Become a Reader

- a. After understanding the issue of dyslexia in people of all ages, Shaywitz turns to vital explanations of how we can help all people strengthen their reading ability. Personal stories illustrate the ideas she shares, which serve to deepen the readers' understanding. She shares the inspiration that "a transformation requires two essential ingredients: early diagnosis and effective treatment" (Shaywitz, 2003, p 171).
4. Overcoming Dyslexia: Turning Struggling Readers into Proficient Readers
    - a. This might be the most powerful part of this writing, as Shaywitz combines all that she has explained throughout the book to point to a road of success for all struggling readers. For example, she enumerates the essentials of what makes for a successful reading intervention plan which includes early intervention, intense instruction, high-quality instruction, and sufficient duration" (Shaywitz, 2003, pgs 257 - 260).

The organization of her writing provides both an in-depth presentation of her research findings and serves as an excellent reference that allows the reader to return to her book for specific, helpful direction on relevant topics.

### Specific Information

Shaywitz begins her book with a strong and compelling explanation of the nature of dyslexia and its ramifications in our society.

“This book is about reading, an extraordinary ability, peculiarly human and yet distinctly unnatural. It is acquired in childhood, forms an intrinsic part of our existence as civilized beings, and is taken for granted by most of us. The unspoken belief is that if, as a child, you are sufficiently motivated and come from a home in which reading is valued, you will learn to read with ease. But as with many other assumptions that appear to make intuitive sense, the assumption that reading comes naturally and easily to all children is simply not true. A substantial number of well-intentioned boys and girls, including very bright ones-experience significant difficulty in learning to read, through no fault of their own. This frustrating and persistent problem in learning to read is called dyslexia” (Shaywitz, 2003, pg 3).

Shaywitz offers wisdom at all stages of the reading process. I recently referred to her book to gather information on adult literacy and dyslexia. She, once again, delivered in a powerful and compelling manner that left me both educated and inspired.

“There is no deadline or age limit for when a person can learn to read. Research attests to the plasticity of the human brain and its ability to reshape itself in mature adults as it does in children. There are many dyslexic adults who are out of school and working or in retirement who simply want to learn to read or have more focused goals related to their work or to pursue a high school equivalency (GED) diploma. Such adults face a serious challenge but one that can be met successfully” (Shaywitz, 2003, pg.288).

“Any adult (no matter how old or young he is) who cannot read or who struggles to read should participate in a literacy program (Shaywitz, 2003, p 288).

### Personal Opinion of the Book's Value

*Overcoming Dyslexia* is a book that I often refer to as the “bible” on dyslexia and is always the one that I recommend to parents of newly diagnosed dyslexics, as well as to educators who want to understand their dyslexic students in a more informed manner. Many are not ready for the entire tome, but this book offers a fantastic education on both the scientific and the practical aspects of this learning disability. I often suggest that parents listen to this book on audio. It can be a challenging read because of its length and scope.

I personally attempt to read this book each year, as a reminder and an instruction manual on helping children and adults learn to read. I purchased it on Audible.com and also have two copies of the printed book, one hardback and one paperback that I have acquired over the years. I leave one at home and have one in my classroom, for quick references and quotes. The audible version helps me access the volume during commutes, air travel and vacation time.

### Recommendation

Both general and special education teachers would benefit from reading *Overcoming Dyslexia*. Parents and dyslexics themselves are encouraged to eye read or ear read this to better understand this specific learning disability. Parents can help educate schools and teachers about the specific dyslexia tendencies of their child and use Shaywitz as a reliable reference. The research, as well as practical applications, are defined and outlined in helpful and inspiring ways

throughout the book. When I speak at conferences, from the Pro Literacy Conference a few years in Minnesota, to our IDA, AL REaD Conference last fall, this is the one book I always recommend. I will continue this practice as well as my habit of rereading this valuable text on a regular basis. I highly recommend it to anyone desiring a deeper understanding of dyslexia.

## References

Shaywitz, Sally E. *Overcoming Dyslexia: a New and Complete Science-Based Program for Reading Problems at Any Level*. Vintage Book, A Division of Random House, Inc., 2003.