

Typefaces for dyslexia

Which typeface do you use? Why do you like it? Do please tell us.

The **designers** below found that dyslexic readers liked:

- Good ascenders and descenders, b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and all capitals; g, j, p, q, y.
- b and d; p and q distinguished, not mirror images.
- Different forms for capital I, lowercase l and digit 1.
- Rounded g as in handwriting. Most liked rounded a, although perhaps some felt that it may be confused with o.
- Letter-spacing, e.g. r, n together rn should not look like m, ('modern' may scan as, or sound like, 'modem'.)

We do not know whether any researchers have tested reading speed, accuracy or comprehension with different typefaces; nor, whether they researched for screen or print presentation apart from Sassoon and Barrington Stoke,.

Publishers often ask the British Dyslexia Association which **typeface** dyslexic people prefer, for PDF files, web and print. For word-processed files on-screen, they like to set their **own preferences** of style, size, colour and background colour, although it may upset the pagination, so MS Word is the most useful format.

Some dyslexic people have expressed strong feelings about typefaces, but there is no agreement apart from saying it should be **sans serif**. This document and all B.D.A. tech pages are in Verdana.

We asked dyslexia forum members. Only a few people responded. So it **may not be a burning issue** for most dyslexic people. On-screen and print preferences may differ. A DSA Assessor noted student preference for 1.5 line spacing. It is likely that line length, line spacing and font size are just as important. **Bigelow and Holmes** make this point in their 2014 review of research which found no evidence of a best typeface for dyslexia. **Arnold Wilkins** showed that children aged 7 to 9 read better with a bigger font size.

1. Microsoft Office Typefaces.

Arial, Comic Sans, Century Gothic, Verdana, Trebuchet, Calibri.

2. Free fonts designed for dyslexia.

Lexia Readable, Open-Dyslexic, Dyslexie.

3. Purchasable fonts, specially designed.

Sassoon, for children, **Sylexiad** for dyslexic adults.

4. Publisher-only fonts, designed for dyslexia.

Barrington Stoke, for children, **Read Regular**.

The most commonly used fonts come with **Microsoft Office**. You can download free ones or buy fonts, for printing or for PDF files. However M.S. Word will not retain them for circulation, if the recipients have not got them.

1. Microsoft Office Typefaces.

It is simpler to keep to sans serif fonts that are in **Microsoft Office**, though none have all the good points listed above.

The font samples shown have identical settings, but the size, (12 point); the letter spacing (normal) and the line spacing (1.5) show very differently.

Some dyslexic people using **Macs** have stated a preference for **Helvetica**

Arial.

Some students are required to use Arial, so they get used to it and state a preference for it. Arial comes early in the alphabetical list of options. You can get more on a page, because the letters are too close together! The rounded g is good. r and n are very close.

- b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and g, j, p, q, y
- b, d; p, q
- Capital I, lowercase l, digit 1.
- g, a, o
- r, n, rn

Compare: Ill, boat, modern.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

Comic Sans.

Comic Sans is the most popular Microsoft font for children. However, some dyslexic adults consider it looks childish. They love it or hate it. It was designed for comic strips. It is not considered professional in the publishing or academic worlds. There is even a 'ban comic sans' web! It meets all dyslexic 'likes' except mirrored b and d.

- b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and g, j, p, q, y
- b, d; p, q
- Capital I, lowercase l, digit 1.
- g, a, o
- r, n, rn

Compare: Ill, boat, modern.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

Century Gothic.

Some dyslexic people like this, perhaps for the roundness of all the letters. It is good that n is not a vertical reversal of u, but in cursive handwriting, u joins from the bottom.

- b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and g, j, p, q, y
- b, d; p, q
- Capital I, lowercase l, digit 1.
- g, a, o
- r, n, rn

Compare: Ill, boat, modern.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

Verdana.

Verdana is much bigger, at the same 12 point. It does well with I, l, 1.

- b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and g, j, p, q, y
- b, d; p, q
- Capital I, lowercase l, digit 1.
- g, a, o
- r, n, rn

Compare: Ill, boat, modern.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

Trebuchet.

This has a 'double-story g'. It slightly distinguishes l, l, 1.

- b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and g, j, p, q, y
- b, d; p, q
- Capital l, lowercase l, digit 1.
- g, a, o
- r, n, rn

Compare: Ill, boat, modern.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

Calibri.

Enquirers have asked B.D.A. tech about Calibri. Some preferences have been noted. Could this be because it is Microsoft default, and people are used to it? It is considerably smaller than other typefaces. It has a 'double-story g'. Capitals are considerably shorter than ascenders, l, l, 1. q has no quiff.

- b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and g, j, p, q, y
- b, d; p, q
- Capital l, lowercase l, digit 1.
- g, a, o
- r, n, rn

Compare: Ill, boat, modern.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

2. Free fonts designed for dyslexia:

Lexia Readable.

[Lexia Readable](#), is freely downloadable for Personal, School, College and Charity use. Unusually, it has different shapes for '6' and '9'. It has all the points mentioned, though some people will object to the unclosed b and p.

- · b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and g, j, p, q, y
- · b, d; p, q
- · Capital I, lowercase l, digit 1.
- · g, a, o
- · r, n, rn

Compare: Ill, boat, modern,

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

Open Dyslexic, Open-Dyslexic, OpenDyslexic.

[Open-Dyslexic](#) is a free, open source font. It can be used on webs and in Microsoft Office. The download offers two free books in Open-Dyslexic. They should work on Nook, Sony Readers, and iBooks, though not Kindle.

It has a rounded g, and distinguishes l, l, 1.

- b, d, f, h, k, l, t, and g, j, p, q, y
- b, d; p, q
- Capital I, lowercase l, digit 1.
- g, a, o
- r, n, rn

Compare: Ill, boat, modern.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

Dyslexie

Christian Boer from Studio Studio in the Netherlands devised the **typeface Dyslexie**. The University of Twente has done independent research on the typeface. Dyslexie is now free for private users.

Christian mentions and applies these points:

- long ascenders and descenders,
- distinction between confusable letters, e.g. b and d, though a miniature capital q for the lower case letter is surprising.
- Capital l, lowercase l and digit 1 are distinguished.
- rounded, g but not a, o.
- good letter-spacing;

Compare: ll, boat, turn.

a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z.

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0.

3. Purchasable fonts specially designed.

Sassoon.

Rosemary Sassoon designed the **Sassoon fonts** for print for very young children, not necessarily dyslexic ones, in the late 1980s. **Teachers like**

them. They have rounded 'a' and 'g', and non-mirrored 'b' and 'd'. The cheapest package is £28.

“Overall, mainstream and special needs children chose letters with a slight slant, plain (sans serif) tops and exit strokes on the baseline. These help to clump the letters together into words. The added features were clear, open counters and slightly lengthened ascenders and descenders to accentuate the word shape.”

Typefaces specially designed for children's reading

Most modern typefaces have shortened ascenders and descenders to fit as much text as possible in a limited space. This is fine for fluent adult readers but what about young children? They need friendly, easily recognisable letters that produce a well defined word shape. The exit strokes that research with children pinpointed, have a part to play too. They clump the letters together along the baseline giving unity to words.

Sylexiad.

Dr. Robert Hillier, a Senior Lecturer at Norwich University College of Arts designed 'Rob's Fonts'. The cheapest package costs £56.

"For the majority of dyslexic readers tested generous word spacing allied to the (light) weight and slightly condensed form (due to long ascenders and descenders) of **the Sylexiad fonts** were important. This would suggest that for subjects with reading difficulties it is the combination of spacing, weight and overall form of a typeface that is important rather than individual letterform design." **Doctoral thesis 2007**. PDF file.

Sylexiad Sans Medium

As a dyslexic reader and designer, I began to question the typographic recommendations of the dyslexia organisations. In doing so, I also questioned the established rules of typographic legibility and in particular the notion of word shape. The aim of my research was therefore to test the dyslexia typeface recommendations against my own typeface designs in order to establish the typographic characteristics dyslexic readers actually preferred and why.

4. Publisher-only typefaces.

Barrington Stoke books:

Patience Thomson, former head of Fairley House School for dyslexic pupils, was the co-founder of [Barrington Stoke publishers](#).

They produce high interest, easy reading level books by well-known authors, mainly for children, but with some for adults.

The company says that it commissioned a specially designed typeface to expert guidelines, to encourage a smooth read. It is based on the natural style of handwriting.

Read Regular.

Natascha Frensch, from the Netherlands, is dyslexic. She designed [Read Regular](#) while doing a master's degree at the London School of Art.

It has all the points that dyslexic readers like, but the web forbids copying. It is not available for purchase.

Further information.

There is further information about document presentation in [Dyslexia Style Guide](#) on B.D.A web.

Comparison page [Typefaces for Dyslexia on Iansyst web](#).

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Chapter Three

Dad was waiting for me.

'Had a good time?' he asked.

'OK,' I said, and I tried to keep the sappy smile off my face. 'Oh - Dad - some girls are coming round tomorrow night to rehearse. Um I've been asked to join a band. We've got a gig, too.'

Dad was great. He didn't leap straight in and ask masses of questions - though I knew he wanted to. He just bashed me on the back, and sent me off to bed.