

Dyslexia, spelling difficulties and dyscalculia

Learners with dyslexia, spelling problems or dyscalculia often struggle with (significant) difficulties that can have a negative impact on their performance at school. This support not only paves the way for a successful career start, but also creates a valuable foundation for their further education and careers.



Dyslexia, spelling difficulties and dyscalculia

As a VET trainer, you may come across learners with dyslexia, spelling problems or dyscalculia. These learning disorders are neurobiological in nature and can arise despite normal intelligence, often remaining for the rest of their life. Learners who are affected by this can still successfully complete vocational education and training. However, they need support to overcome their particular problems and develop their individual potential.

Selection tests such as the Stellwerk test, the Basic Check or the Multicheck are not adapted to young people with reading and spelling disabilities (LRS) or dyscalculia. They distort their results. It is therefore important that these young people can prove their abilities in a different way when looking for an apprenticeship, e.g. in a pre-vocational traineeship.

Vocational education and training, with its high proportion of practical work, is usually an ideal form of training for people with dyslexia, spelling difficulties or dyscalculia. However, these problems are often only discovered during vocational education and training. With the necessary and appropriate support, those affected can develop their full potential. Many of those affected now run their own business that they have built up themselves; for them, vocational education and training was the start of a successful career.

This fact sheet is intended to help you understand how you, as a VET trainer, can help learners with dyslexia, a spelling problem or dyscalculia.

- Dyslexia means having difficulty reading.
- Spelling disorder (dysorthography) means having difficulties with spelling.
- Dyscalculia refers to a mathematical disorder in which those affected find it difficult to grasp basic mathematical operations and concepts and to develop a mathematical understanding.

These disorders may become noticeable in kindergarten or primary school, though they can also only appear during in vocational training and make learning more difficult. It is important to remember that, despite these difficulties, the affected learners often have (great) potential and can be (very) successful in many fields, e.g. in practical activities.

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Support in day-to-day life as a VET trainer

You can help in the following ways in your role as a VET trainer:

As the VET trainer, let the learner with one of the aforementioned disorders know that they can contact you at any time and count on your support. Take the disorder into account when organising the in-company training.

Individual adjustments:

discuss any difficulties with the affected person and take their specific needs into account. Define clear structures when setting tasks and allow extra time to work on written assignments or exams.

Technological aids:

allow the use of aids such as spelling programs, calculators, language software or a reading pen to break down barriers to learning.

Visual and verbal support:

In addition, explain tasks using visual aids or verbally to make them easier to understand and make sure the learner has understood the task well. Changing the font size or typeface can also be helpful.

Clear communication and flexibility:

provide regular feedback to learners and work closely with them to monitor their progress. Be flexible when designing learning processes.

Measures to level out disadvantages

Measures to level out disadvantages are necessary for learners with dyslexia, spelling problems or dyscalculia to create equal opportunities. Those affected need special framework conditions in order to demonstrate their potential.

The right to the levelling out disadvantages can be claimed at VET schools, in branch courses and in-company training – as well as during examinations and in the qualification procedures.

Examples of such measures include:

- Allowing extra time for written examinations or other tasks.
- Use of technical aids such as calculators, special software programs, reading pens or notes.
- Alternative examination formats: examinations can also be taken in another form (e.g. oral rather than written).
- Special support through remedial courses or development programmes, if necessary.
- Further adjustments: large font size, sans-serif font (Arial, Helvetica, etc.), separate examination room, personal assistance.
- Regular breaks: those affected get tired faster than other learners. which is why they need regular breaks.

IMPORTANT: Measures for levelling out disadvantages may not be noted in the certificate.

Recommendation No. 7 of the SBBK concerning levelling out disadvantages applies to all training and qualification procedures in vocational education and training (including the federal vocational baccalaureate). It serves as a tool for implementing the Vocational Education and Training Act. [Please see the link on page 5.](#)

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Requirement for applying for the levelling out of disadvantages

Documentation of the learning disorder/diagnosis is already available:

In order to receive measures for levelling out disadvantages, the learning disorder must be documented. As a VET trainer, you should ensure that the learner/parents have already identified and documented the learning disorder during their school career (e.g. by a specialist authority or a psychologist).

If this is not the case:

If a learning disorder is suspected:

If dyslexia, spelling problems and dyscalculia are suspected: Find a specialist who can carry out these investigations as quickly as possible. For information about evaluation centres, please contact the Swiss Dyslexia Association (VDS). The link can be found on page 4.

The diagnosis has been made:

In order to receive levelling out disadvantages, the company and the learner must submit the diagnosis with the completed application for levelling out disadvantages to the cantonal VET office.

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Legal basis for measures for levelling out disadvantages

Swiss Federal Constitution [BV], Disability Discrimination Act [DDA], Vocational Education and Training Act [VETA], Vocational Education and Training Ordinance [VETO] etc.) learners are entitled to measures for levelling out disadvantages if they are disadvantaged due to a disability or learning disorder.

The measures for levelling out disadvantages are to be applied at VET schools, in branch courses and in host companies – in particular during examinations and as part of the qualification procedures. They serve to compensate as much as possible for the disadvantage that a person suffers as a result of a learning disability.

The following applies to the qualification procedures: The examinations must be organised in such a way that all learners have the opportunity to take them under fair conditions. This is achieved by granting measures for levelling out disadvantages, these being determined individually.

You can find more information on this in the SDBB publication “Levelling out disadvantages for people with disabilities in vocational education and training”. [Please see the link on page 5.](#)

Comorbid disorders: AD(H)D and dyslexia, spelling disorder or dyscalculia

In addition to dys- disorders, attention deficit disorder with or without hyperactivity (ADHD) is being diagnosed more and more frequently.

If a learner also has AD(H)S, special measures are required. Students with AD(H)S need additional support due to concentration disorders, impulsiveness or the compulsion to move. Here, too, learning conditions can be improved through measures for levelling out disadvantages. These include the provision of a quiet workplace or structured orders with time management. Appropriate measures should always be discussed individually with the learner and agreed in writing, ideally at the beginning of the curriculum.

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Specific action steps for you as a VET trainer

Early identification of the learning disorder:

if a learner has difficulty reading, writing, with arithmetic or concentrating during his or her apprenticeship, talk to him or her about this openly. Ask if they have already been diagnosed and offer support.

Collaboration with the VET school and specialist authorities:

if necessary, work together with the VET school and the specialist authorities to ensure that the learner receives the necessary support.

Offer advice and support:

give the learner the opportunity to seek support if necessary, e.g. with tutoring, special courses or advice from a specialist centre for learning disabilities.

Promoting strengths:

many learners with dyslexia or dyscalculia have other talents, e.g. in practical or creative fields. Be sure to encourage these strengths and give positive feedback to learners.

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Legal basis

UN-CRC, UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Convention of 13 December 2006 on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, SR 0.109)

FC (Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation of 18 April 1999, SR 101)

DDA, Disability Discrimination Act (Federal Act of 13 December 2002 on the Elimination of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, SR 151.3)

VPETA, Vocational and Professional Education and Training Act (Federal Act of 13 December 2002 on Vocational and Professional Education and Training, SR 412.10)

PVPETO, Vocational and Professional Education and Training Ordinance (Ordinance of 19 November 2003 on Vocational and Professional Education and Training, SR 412.101)

(Laws can be accessed with SR numbers at: → [fedlex.admin.ch](https://www.fedlex.admin.ch))

Important links

→ [vocationaleducation.ch/addresses](https://www.vocationaleducation.ch/addresses)

List of cantonal VET offices. Point of contact for initial information and referral to specialist units.

→ [edk.ch](https://www.edk.ch)

Recommendation No. 7 of the SBBK concerning levelling out disadvantages

→ [vocationaleducation.ch/glossary](https://www.vocationaleducation.ch/glossary)

All important VET terms are described in short and informative texts.

→ [verband-dyslexie.ch](https://www.verband-dyslexie.ch)

Further information and information about evaluation centres

Further literature

→ shop.sdbb.ch

Levelling out disadvantages for people with disabilities in vocational education and training, 2nd edition 2015, SDBB / CSFO

→ [szh.ch](https://www.szh.ch)

Up-to-date information on levelling out disadvantages, Swiss Centre for Special Needs Education Foundation

→ [lern-tipps.ch](https://www.lern-tipps.ch)

Monika Lichtsteiner Müller, dyslexia, dyscalculia: Equal opportunities in vocational education and training, secondary school and university, 2nd edition 2013, hep Verlag

Prepared by the Board of the Swiss Dyslexia Association (VDS) → [verband-dyslexie.ch](https://www.verband-dyslexie.ch)

February 2026 edition

This and other fact sheets can be found at:

→ [vocationaleducation.ch/factsheets](https://www.vocationaleducation.ch/factsheets)

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