

Do I Have Dyslexia or Irlen Syndrome?

Let us first define **Dyslexia**.

According to the [International Dyslexia Association](#), “Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to a cluster of symptoms, which result in people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words.” A formal definition of dyslexia used by the [National Institute of Child Health and Human Development](#) states, “It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and / or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties 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. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

At its core, current experts agree that dyslexia is a language-based disorder, and treatment generally focuses on using a multisensory structured language approach to help individuals with dyslexia strengthen the brain pathways that connect speech with print. In fact, it is a misnomer that the telltale sign of dyslexia is seeing words backwards. Instead, it is an inability to connect the letters and words they see on the page with their sounds and meanings.

In contrast, **Irlen Syndrome** is a perceptual processing disorder, meaning that it relates specifically to how the brain processes the visual information it receives. It is not a language-based disorder and phonics-based instruction will not help someone with Irlen Syndrome improve in the same way it will help someone with dyslexia improve their reading skills. At its core, Irlen Syndrome is a light sensitivity, where individuals are sensitive to a specific wavelength of light and this sensitivity is what causes the physical and visual symptoms that people with Irlen Syndrome experience. People with Irlen Syndrome have difficulty reading not because their brains have difficulty connecting the letters they see with the sounds those letters make, but because they see distortions on the printed page, or because the white background or glare hurts their eyes, gives them a headache, or makes them fall asleep when trying to read.

Unlike dyslexia, difficulties experienced as a result of Irlen Syndrome can reach well beyond just reading. People with Irlen Syndrome have difficulty processing all visual information, not just words on a printed page, so they often experience difficulty with depth perception, driving, sports performance, and other areas not generally connected with dyslexia.

It is possible for someone to suffer from both dyslexia and Irlen Syndrome, and proper treatment for both disorders should be sought out. For more information about Irlen Syndrome, visit <http://irlen.com/what-is-irlen-syndrome/>.