

Auditory Processing Disorder/APD and using a reader/scribe

Auditory Processing Disorder/APD is a medical condition of neurological origin which can co-exist with any /all other conditions, learning disabilities and other medical conditions, and often does. It is thought to be present in 2-7% of children and over 20% of adults, and its prevalence increases steeply in children with learning difficulties, with up to 40% of these children having Auditory Processing deficits. In my experience, APD rarely exists in isolation.

APD is thought to be one of the main causes of dyslexia (what is commonly known as auditory dyslexia affecting acquisition of phonics knowledge). In some cases, this phonological deficit can also affect speech. It is caused by APD via the inability to accurately process, remember and differentiate speech sounds/phonemes. (This is not something that can be remediated by using phonics because the learner's brain does not, and will not, learn to process sound and speech properly). Many learners with Auditory Processing Disorder/APD might therefore have additional problems with reading/writing (APD has been estimated as present in up to 60% of cases of dyslexia).

The need for a reader/scribe will also depend on their other individual co-morbid difficulties such as Dyspraxia/DCD and mobility issues affecting fine motor skills etc. Some learners with APD may therefore have more than one reason for needing a reader and/or scribe.

Learners with APD who do qualify for a reader/scribe in tests and exams should also qualify for 25% extra time to allow for their processing deficits and accompanying word retrieval difficulties. Even learners with APD who do not qualify for a reader/scribe in tests and exams should qualify for this extra time. (The reason that a learner with APD would need extra time is to allow for delayed processing of what is said to them, and to allow for the word retrieval difficulties which often accompany APD and put them at a disadvantage when formulating a response).

Any reader/scribe must receive appropriate training, as they are skills that need to be learned and practiced by those providing them, and this function should only be provided by those trained and designated for the task.

Using a reader/scribe is a skill that any learner also needs to get used to. It takes time for the scribe to teach the learner how to master the skill of using a reader/scribe if they are to benefit from it, and to build trust and confidence. It cannot be provided out of the blue and be expected to be of any help. Practice is even more vital in a child with APD for whom using a reader/scribe will present its own difficulties.

As with any learner expecting to use a reader/scribe, this accommodation should therefore be available for all tests/exams after training, both internal and external, from as early an age as possible. This is for two reasons; because the learner *needs* the support/accommodation, and because they also need ample opportunity to practice in order to master working with a reader/scribe: using either involves distinct skills which may not come naturally to most learners.

Any learner using a reader/scribe should ideally be given the same person each time, or at the very least one of a couple of people that they are used to working with. For a learner with APD this is doubly important. The learner with APD will need to be familiar with the reader's voice in order to have a chance of efficiently processing the reader's speech patterns; if they are not, this puts them at a distinct disadvantage in processing/understanding what is read to them. Using someone they have not practised with would be counter-productive. It might take them longer to understand them, or what is read might be incompletely processed or misunderstood. Also, in some cases the use of that reader would be pointless and only serve

to add to their distress in an already stressful situation, adversely affecting the outcome of the test/exam, as stress also has a detrimental effect on processing.

In addition, some people with APD have more problems with processing female voices and some with males, and this deficit has to be accommodated for the learner to get the best chance of processing/understanding what is read to them.

These accommodations are not to give the learner with APD any advantage; they are to 'level the playing field', allowing the learner to do what those without APD and other additional needs can do automatically.

The use of a reader/scribe must be administered properly and consistently. Neither of these accommodations nor the extra time can be withdrawn at any time, because the learner relies on it to access an appropriate education according to the Education Act, and every effort should be made to ensure the learner is never left without this access; to do so puts them at a distinct disadvantage in any test/exam, and their test/exam results will not be a valid reflection of their ability.

Withdrawal of such access arrangements or failure to implement them properly will unnecessarily put the learner in a position of failure, affecting their self-esteem and knocking their confidence, thus discriminating against a learner with a recognised medical condition/disability.

Parents should therefore make a formal complaint to the local education authority and/or JCQ in the case of external exam arrangements if access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special considerations (where applicable) are not applied for by their school when requested, or if they are not implemented properly, or withdrawn; their child's exam results and future may rest on their efficiency. Parents can also apply direct to the local authority and/or JCQ regarding access arrangements, reasonable adjustments and special considerations for external exams if the school refuses.

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<https://apdsupportuk.yolasite.com/>

<https://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration>