

Dyslexics can do Dissertations!!

Hi, I'm Mel, a third year student at the Royal Agricultural University.

Everybody is different. What may be a simple task for one person, will be a struggle for another. And one thing I have always struggled with is reading, writing and spelling – I have a reading and spelling age of approximately a 10 year old! However, I feel in many ways this may have helped me during my time at Cirencester, especially being quite a competitive person, and always trying to give everything my best shot. This is fairly typical of dyslexics, by the way. We are used to having to put a lot of extra effort into everything that we do, simply because we find the whole business of reading and writing so difficult!

Therefore in order to do my dissertation (and other work) I always have to start earlier than others so that I can have the work proof read, and/or looked over by a member of staff or family. This has also meant I have had more time to think about the subject or adjust what I am trying to say. For this reason I started my dissertation earlier than most.

One of the problems with my particular type of dyslexia is that the written word does not really mean very much, and I struggle to form sentences that actually make sense. I have a tendency to talk 'round and round' a subject instead of actually punching out the facts. By getting the work down on paper early on I have at least then got a basic lump of text, gibberish though much of it will be which I can then edit, delete, re-structure and retype. It all takes time but for me it is the only way I can get to grips with what I have to do.

Everybody – by that I mean mainly lecturers and past students - always says three things: start your dissertation early, do your research, and make sure you read around the subject. For me, starting in good time was vital and I cannot emphasise how important this was for me especially, mainly because it all took me a great deal more time than I had originally anticipated.

This all makes me sound like a right goody-goody doesn't it! But anybody who knows me well will also know that I do have other interests! I think that for me the most important thing was making sure that the kind people who were doing my proof reading had sufficient time. Also one tends to forget that other people have to try and fit any proof reading into their busy schedules so it is no good expecting someone to drop everything and spend a couple of hours proof reading at the drop of a hat. I needed to give them the proof about a week before I needed it back so that they had plenty of time. I still think I drove my supervisor up the wall, the number of times I emailed her to ask questions and asking her to check my work! But I did find it worthwhile getting as many different people as possible to read over my dissertation, as everyone picks up on

different areas. But hopefully it will pay off in the long run. Also areas such as presentation and setting everything out correctly is important and a simple way to gain marks.

I think in my case, as with a lot of other dyslexics, it is not that we are 'thick' and cannot do the work - in fact many dyslexics have a higher IQ than many so called 'normal' people; it is more that we struggle when it comes to getting it down on paper, the words come out in a 'jumble' and it just does not come out right, and this is why proof reading is so important. All the knowledge and information is there, it is just a case of making sense of it, transferring it to paper in a form that can be easily understood by others.

I do believe that being dyslexic is not a disadvantage, as it teaches you to be self-motivated and to get on with things. In fact there are many very famous dyslexics, Winston Churchill, Laura Ashley and Richard Branson being a small example. Dyslexics have to be more focused, more driven and more determined, but we often have better visual memories probably because we have had to learn to compensate. Reading will always be a problem for me as it always takes me longer than anyone else, but this unfortunately is an essential part of a dissertation and therefore I had to start earlier than most people.

We are lucky at the RAU as we have a good extra support team. John Conway, the Disability Officer at the University helped me sort out my Disabled Student Allowance and gave me lots of advice and help, sorting out extra time for my exams.

It was during my third year I started going to see Cathy, the Dyslexic Tutor at the RAU. She was always willing to read my work and explain my mistakes. This has been a huge help, especially with my dissertation. I owe her much appreciation and thanks.

Being dyslexic you are entitled to extra help support, and it is there for a reason, so if I had to offer any advice I would say it is important to make the most of this and above all, start in good time. And really go for it!