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# **Clinical Placement Handbook for Nursing Students with Dyslexia**

**Funded by School of Nursing and  
Midwifery, Trinity College Dublin**



# Introduction

The aim of this handbook is to provide advice for students with specific learning difficulties. This advice will centre on constructing strategies for you to use on clinical placements and in the future work place. Although this handbook was written to assist students with dyslexia, it is expected it will be of use for all students.

Having a specific learning difficulty means that you may have difficulty with reading, writing, spelling or mathematics. You may also have difficulties with memory, time management and processing information. This booklet will help you develop strategies to use on your work placement and in your working life.

College is committed to supporting students with dyslexia and student nurses are encouraged to meet their Disability Officer (see Contact details section) to determine any reasonable accommodations. A reasonable accommodation (RA) might be any action that helps alleviate a substantial disadvantage. Making a reasonable accommodation might involve changing procedures, modifying the delivery of the course taken and providing additional services (e.g. examination arrangements).

Disclosing can be difficult, but registering with the Disability Service is the first step in the disclosure process. By not disclosing you are unlikely to receive the support you require and this can make you more anxious. Under the Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2004, public bodies such as College are required to provide reasonable accommodations for any student with a disability.

**Alison Doyle,**  
Disability Service,  
Trinity College Dublin

## **Guide for Clinical Placement**

<b>1. Planning your Placement</b>	<b>4</b>
• Contacting your Nurse Practice Development Co-ordinator	4
• Strengths and weaknesses	5
• Learning styles	6
<b>2. General Advice</b>	<b>7</b>
• Stress and anxiety	7
• Managing handovers	8
• Tips from TCD nursing students	9
<b>3. Calculating Drugs</b>	<b>10</b>
• Steps in calculation	10
• Useful websites	11
<b>4. Nursing Terminology</b>	<b>12</b>
• Learning medical words and terms	12
<b>5. Practical Strategies</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6. Assistive Technology</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>7. Contact details</b>	<b>22</b>
• Useful contacts	22
• Notes	23

**Planning your placement start at section 1**

**General advice start at section 2**

**Calculating drugs start at section 3**

**Nursing terminology start at section 4**

**Practical strategies start at section 5**

**Assistive Technology start at section 6**

**Contacts and Notes start at section 7**

# **Section 1**

## **Planning your Placement**

### **Contacting your Nurse Practice Development Coordinator (NPDC)**

Your Disability Officer will have forwarded a needs assessment document called the Learning Educational Needs Summary (LENS) to you, your personal tutor, the Academic Liaison Officer in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, and the Allocations Officer, who will forward this document to your Nurse Practice Development Coordinator (NPDC).

This LENS advises you to meet with your NPDC prior to starting a placement. This will help you to familiarise yourself with the setting and to discuss any reasonable accommodations outlined in the LENS.



## Strengths and weaknesses

Below is an example of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis that you could use to think about and prepare for your placement:

<b>My Strengths</b>	<b>My Weaknesses</b>
<b>Use these!</b>	<b>Work on these!</b>
What skills do I have? What personal resources do I have access to? What do other people see as my strengths? How can I use these to help me on placement?	What could I improve? What should I avoid if possible? What things are the people around me likely to see as weaknesses?
<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Threats</b>
<b>Use these!</b>	<b>Anticipate, address or avoid!</b>
What opportunities will I have to improve my skills? What things can I take advantage of? What do I want to have learned by the end of the placement?	What things might be difficult? Could any of my weaknesses affect my performance?

By completing this analysis you are on your way to making a plan of action: identifying the things you need to do before placement.

Another way of planning is to think about the what, when, how and where of what you need to do, and make a list.

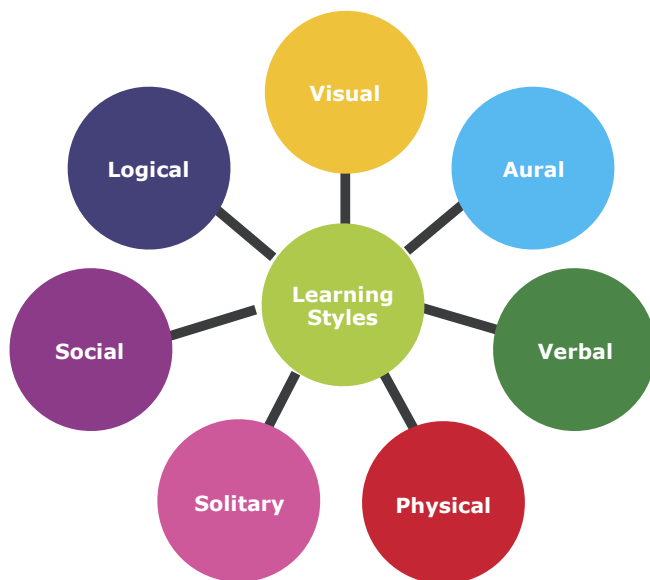
<b>What do you need to do?</b>	<b>When do you need to do it?</b>
<b>Where will this take place/ where do I need to go?</b>	<b>How am I going to do this?</b>

## **Learning Styles**

There are seven main learning styles, one or more of which may apply to you:

- **Visual (Spatial):** you may prefer to use pictures, images or spatial understanding, including using mind maps.
- **Aural (Auditory):** you may learn best by listening to information, and may use music or rhythm to help you do so.
- **Verbal (Linguistic):** people prefer using words, both in speech and writing.
- **Physical (kinaesthetic):** individuals prefer using their body, hands and senses to process information. They enjoy learning by 'doing'.
- **Logical (Mathematical):** you learn best by using logic, reasoning and a systematic way of working.
- **Social (Interpersonal):** you are someone who prefers to learn by working as part of a team or in partnership with other people.

Thinking about your preferred mode of learning can help you identify how to manage information on your placement. You can explore your learning preference by taking an online test, such as  
<http://www.ldpride.net/learning-style-test.html> or  
<http://www.learning-styles-online.com>.





## Section 2

### General Advice



#### Stress and anxiety

All students get stressed at some point during their course. However knowing where your strengths and weaknesses lie, and how you can adapt these to help you on placement, is an advantage.

Some of the common worries for both students and clinical placement staff are:

- Attitudes towards specific learning difficulties
- Communicating difficulties
- Disclosing difficulties in order to get supports
- Emotional Factors
- Fitness to Practice
- Learning Outcomes
- Reasonable Adjustments

As a nursing student you are encouraged to:

- Take responsibility for your learning
- Understand professional accountability
- Develop skills for employability

It may be necessary to make adjustments or provide reasonable accommodations on placements. However, it is NOT expected that educational standards will be lowered to accommodate students with specific learning difficulties. The criterion for determining whether an adjustment is reasonable, is the maintenance of course standards both academic and in clinical practice.

At all times, College and placement providers will pay due regard to the need to ensure that the student is not discriminated against, victimised or harassed as a result of a having a specific learning difficulty.

### **Managing Handover**

Passing on information for handover is extremely important for ensuring continuous care. You might decide to make your own handover reminder sheet, or use your own form of shorthand to make notes, before completing patient records or hand over forms.



## Tips from our nurses

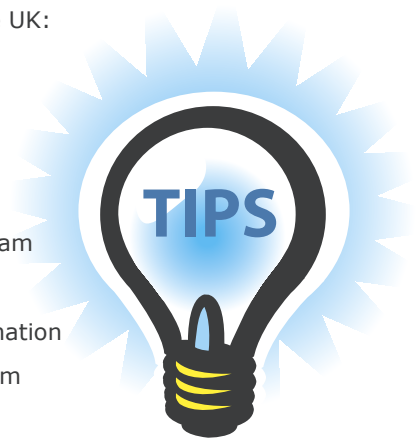
One of our 3rd year nursing students said that although she did not like sitting in the ward whilst writing her notes, she realised that this allowed her to observe and communicate with the patients, and ask questions relevant to the notes. She also finds it useful is to carry a notebook which reminds her to look things up when it's quiet, and refer back to educational things she may have heard or learned.

Another student advises that students should tell their supervisor at the first opportunity, including their Clinical Practice Preceptor. This will alleviate any problems from the start of the placement. In addition, try to make things as simple as possible, don't complicate situations just because you have dyslexia. "I found that I had no problem when I stated from the start that I was dyslexic. I got a lot of support from staff in relation to spelling and formulating sentences. The majority of staff can empathise with you as they know someone with the same problem. Taking notes always helps and gives you confidence."

## Top 10 Tips from the Royal College of Nursing (UK)

These are offered by a 3rd year nurse in the UK:

1. Research your ward
2. Draw up a list of objectives
3. Ask questions
4. Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know'
5. Spend time with the multi-disciplinary team
6. Talk to patients!
7. Know your patients and share your information
8. Ask for feedback and constructive criticism
9. Reflect each day
10. Enjoy being a student!



You can view all past issues of 'The Answer', the Royal College of Nursing magazine at [http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/students/the\\_answer/the\\_answer\\_archive](http://www.rcn.org.uk/development/students/the_answer/the_answer_archive)

# Section 3

## Calculating Drugs

Getting the maths right is very important in nursing, to ensure that the patient receives the right amount of medication that has been prescribed. The following basic principles are taken from Trimble (2004):

### Steps in calculation

Formula 1 (F1): Converting a larger unit of weight, measure or volume to a smaller one	
Kilogram (kg) to gram (g)	x 1000
Gram (g) to milligram (mg)	x 1000
Milligram (mg) to microgram (µg)	x 1000
Microgram (µg) to nanogram (ng)	x 1000
Litre (l) to millilitre (ml)	x 1000

Formula 2 (F2): Converting a smaller unit of weight, measure or volume to a larger one	
Nanogram (ng) to microgram (µg)	÷ 1000
Microgram (µg) to milligram (mg)	÷ 1000
Milligram (mg) to gram (g)	÷ 1000
Gram (g) to kilogram (kg)	÷ 1000
Millilitre (ml) to litre (l)	÷ 1000



Some drug administrations may require complex calculations to ensure that the correct volume or quantity of medication is administered (NMC, 2004). Below are some examples:

### Formula 3 (F3):

$$\frac{\text{Known weight/volume}}{\text{Known volume}} \times \text{desired volume}$$

### Formula 4 (F4):

$$\frac{\text{What you want}}{\text{What you have got}} \times \text{What it is in}$$

Examples of using these formulas can be found in Jo Trimble's paper in the British Journal of Nursing, 2004 (see references).

### Useful websites

It is very important to practice calculations, so you may find the following websites useful:

A site that will help to review the major concepts related to drug calculations and provide a few exercises that you can perform on your own to check your skills.

<http://www.nursesaregreat.com/articles/drugcal.htm>

This site contains four tests that have been created by a software program. They consist of twenty questions complete with help, answers and solutions to the problems.

<http://www.geocities.com/HotSprings/8517/drugcalc.htm>

Practice tests for metric conversions, tablet doses, fluid doses etc. Test software available for download (shareware, Microsoft Windows only).

<http://www.testandcalc.com/>

There are some excellent online tools available to help you plan and organise your placement, including a Medication Management elearning package which can be accessed from [www.nursingboard.ie](http://www.nursingboard.ie) or from [www.hseland.ie/tohm/default.asp](http://www.hseland.ie/tohm/default.asp)



## **Section 4**

# **Nursing Terminology**

A comprehensive description of nursing terms and abbreviations approved by the HSE is available from [http://www.hse.ie/eng/Publications/services/Hospitals/NHO\\_Abbreviations\\_Booklet.pdf](http://www.hse.ie/eng/Publications/services/Hospitals/NHO_Abbreviations_Booklet.pdf)

This booklet includes information on:

- Rules for Abbreviations
- Drugs and Prescribing
- Doses
- Frequency of Administration
- Days of the Week
- Time Abbreviations
- Approved General Abbreviations List

**Students should refer to the local Abbreviation and Documentation Guidelines in their Practice Placement Area.**

### **Learning medical words/terms**

If you are having difficulty with pronunciation of particular words, why not use the 'howjsay' website <http://www.howjsay.com/> Type in your word or phrase in the box, click on submit. When your entry appears in pink, roll your mouse over it to hear the pronunciation.

You can also type a word into the pronunciation feature of Texthelp, which will automatically split it into syllables, sometimes an easier way to learn the spellings.

### **Online dictionary**

<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>



## Section 5

# Practical Strategies

Pre-placement	Strategies to be developed by student
Difficulty with organisation and time management, orientation, lack of confidence, poor self esteem, anxiety	<p>Make a list of things you need to find out/discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you need to do?</li> <li>• When do you need to do it?</li> <li>• What kind of help might you need?</li> <li>• Where will this take place/where do you need to go?</li> <li>• What do you need to bring with you?</li> </ul>



Completing documentation	Strategies to be developed by student
<p>Weaknesses in short-term (working) memory, processing speed, auditory and visual sequential memory</p> <p>Slow writing speed, words written phonetically i.e. as they sound</p> <p>Word and letter reversal, i.e. b/ d, saw/was</p> <p>Poor hand writing under time pressure</p> <p>Easily distracted</p> <p>Difficulty simultaneously listening and writing down information</p> <p>Completing documentation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask someone to check your work</li><li>• Write notes early/as you go along</li><li>• Minimise punctuation</li><li>• Copy word/terminology from another source i.e. dictionary, client notes</li><li>• Create a list of phases to refer to</li><li>• Ask someone to spell the word</li><li>• Practice completing common documentation/forms</li><li>• Develop shorthand/code/abbreviations</li><li>• Learn clinical spellings</li><li>• Check with staff to ensure information is accurate and complete.</li></ul>





Handover procedures	Strategies to be developed by student
<p>Weaknesses in working memory, processing speed, visual sequential memory and visual stress</p> <p>Weak word attack and word recognition skills</p> <p>Slow reading speed</p> <p>Words 'jump' or blur on the page – visual stress</p> <p>Requires several attempts at reading to absorb information</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and practice word attack and reading skills to be able to find relevant information</li> <li>• Use Read/Write technology to improve reading/pronunciation</li> <li>• Ask for notes to be read aloud</li> <li>• Find a quiet space away from distractions to read</li> <li>• Use coloured overlays</li> <li>• In an emergency ask another to read information.</li> <li>• Practice reading completed common documentation/forms</li> <li>• Practice reading nursing terms appropriate to the health service provider</li> <li>• Practice client handover sheets</li> </ul>



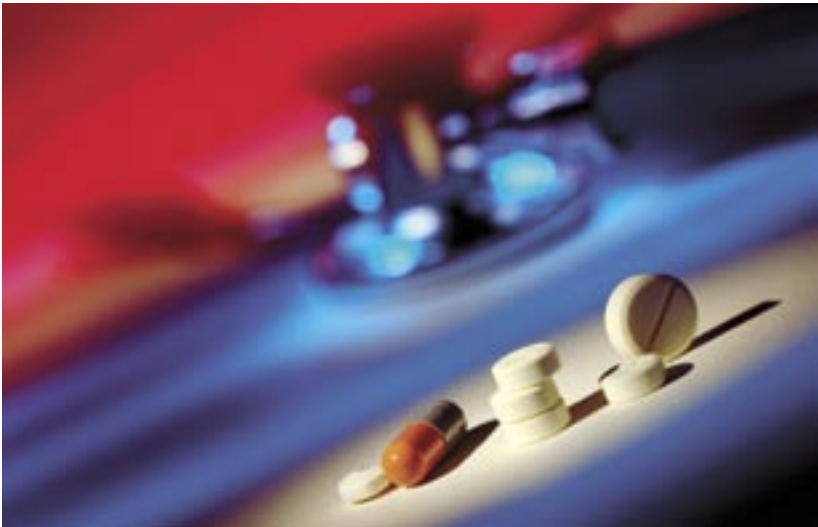
<b>Labs, use of equipment and procedures</b>	<b>Strategies to be developed by student</b>
<p>Poor short and long-term memory combined with lack of confidence and poor self esteem.</p> <p>Anxiety which may affect retention and recall of information, for example name and sequence of procedures.</p> <p>Left/right confusion.</p> <p>Disorientation within practice setting i.e. moving clients into different locations, locating equipment, co-ordinating a procedure</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a note pad to write information down</li><li>• Highlight or number priorities</li><li>• Ask instructions to be repeated to confirm understanding</li><li>• Talk through procedures with other students to aid processing of information</li><li>• Use audio equipment e.g. dictaphone to practice</li><li>• If provided, watch podcasts/ videos of procedures</li></ul>



Giving verbal instructions/ reporting	Strategies to be developed by student
<p>Weaknesses in short-term (working) memory, processing speed, auditory and visual sequential memory</p> <p>Difficulty reading aloud i.e. from client records</p> <p>Mispronunciation or inability to pronounce words</p> <p>Using wrong words in context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spell word aloud or show word to mentor for them to pronounce word</li> <li>• Ask a fellow student</li> <li>• Use <a href="http://www.howjsay.com">www.howjsay.com</a> or the pronunciation tool in Texthelp to practice</li> <li>• Practice with peers and academic support staff</li> <li>• Practice using a Dictaphone</li> </ul>



<b>Drug calculations</b>	<b>Strategies to be developed by student</b>
<p>Weak word attack/reading skills, phonics and /or erratic spelling. Poor ability to find relevant information. Difficulties with ability to correctly identify, read, pronounce and write drug names and doses, and completing documentation of medication given.</p> <p>Poor working memory and symbol recognition affecting mathematical calculations, recall and using learning formulas.</p> <p>Difficulty in following sequences, word and letter reversal i.e. +/x or 3/E.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use a note pad to write and calculate medication</li><li>• Create crib sheet or memory aid such as colour coding, practice calculator and drug calculation formulae</li><li>• Check information and ask for information to be checked</li><li>• Demonstrations and repetition to aid drug names and retention of routines</li><li>• Practice pronunciation of drug names using <a href="http://www.howjsay.com">www.howjsay.com</a></li><li>• Create mnemonic strategies for common names</li></ul>



Practical procedures/use of equipment	Strategies to be developed by student
<p>Difficulties with laterality and orientation</p> <p>Poor sequential memory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practice talking through steps in procedures</li> <li>• Practice and use of repetition to aid laterality - right is the hand you write with, crossing of hands to identify client's left &amp; right side</li> <li>• Number steps and learn how many steps each procedure has</li> <li>• Create picture representations</li> </ul>



## Section 6

# Assistive Technology

The **Quicktionary SuperPen Professional** is a scanning pen with a number of specialist dictionaries including a medical US dictionary. This means you can scan in a medical term, hear it read back and see the definition of the term. Although the medical dictionary is American it does recognise many UK specific terms.



The **Franklin DMQ-1870** is a UK spell checker and dictionary with speech feedback. It includes a UK medical dictionary as part its reference suit.

**Inductel's Medical Dictionary and Speller** is an American medical dictionary which includes UK specific terms, and operates on Windows and Mac. Throughout the dictionary there are hundreds of anatomical illustrations including clickable graphics. The spell checking tool integrates 100 000 medical terms into the spell checker of common word processing applications such as Microsoft Word.



**Spellex UK Medical Spell Checker** integrates 300 000 terms into the spell checker of your word processor. It will work with most versions of Word (PC or MAC). You can buy Spellex Spell Checkers covering more than one topic including dentistry and pharmacy.



**Texthelp Read and Write Gold** is networked on all College computers. You can find this software by clicking on Start/All Programs/Texthelp systems/Read and Write.

**Read the Words** is an online text to speech tool which you can use at home, a very basic service is available free. However paid membership at a cost of €20 per year includes:

- Create UNLIMITED Audio Files up to 1 hr in length
- Select from 15 Voices
- 25 Podcasts
- 25 Embedded Readings
- 25 Saved Readings.

<http://www.readthewords.com>

## **Section 7**

### **Contact Details**

The Disability Service Reception is located in Room 2054, beside the Lecky Library, in the Arts Building, Trinity College Dublin. You can make appointments here

For queries, you can contact us as follows:

- By Phone: (01) 896 3111
- By Text/SMS (for Deaf Students): 086 3442322
- By Email: [disab@tcd.ie](mailto:disab@tcd.ie)
- By Fax: (01) 896 3672

#### **Staff**

Alison Doyle

Disability Officer – Specific Learning Difficulties

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Email: [acostel@tcd.ie](mailto:acostel@tcd.ie)

Tel: (01) 896 2903

Nursing Practice Development Co-ordinator:

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Personal tutor:

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## Notes

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# Disability Service

Seirbhís do dhaoine faoi mhíchumas

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Disability Service,  
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Seomra 2054,  
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