

Could it be more than "just a slow reader"?

A first-look checklist for parents of children in Primary 1 to Primary 6 who wonder whether struggles with reading, spelling or writing go beyond a phase they will simply outgrow.

This is not a diagnostic tool. It cannot tell you whether your child has dyslexia, dysgraphia or any other learning difficulty. It is designed only to help you notice patterns worth discussing with a professional. Some of these signs are normal in Primary 1, especially letter reversals before about age 7 to 8. What matters is a pattern that continues over time.

For each item, mark how often it applies to your child right now: Never · Rarely · Sometimes · Often · Very often.

Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often
READING AND DECODING					
Sounds out the same familiar word again and again, as if seeing it for the first time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Guesses words from the first letter or the picture instead of reading them through	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reads slowly and with effort, loses their place, or skips or repeats lines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Reading aloud is far weaker than how well they speak and understand when listening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SOUNDS AND LETTERS					
Finds it hard to rhyme, clap syllables, or break a word into its sounds (c-a-t)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Still mixes up letters like b/d or p/q, or "was"/"saw", after about age 7 to 8	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SPELLING					
Spells the same word several different ways on one page	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Spells by sound well past peers (e.g. "sed" for said, "becos" for because)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Scores well on the spelling test, then misspells the same words in their own writing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
HANDWRITING					
Holds the pencil very tightly or awkwardly, or says their hand hurts after a short time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Letters vary a lot in size, spacing is uneven, or writing drifts off the line	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Copying from the board or a book is slow and full of mistakes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Writes much more slowly than classmates and often cannot finish written work in time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
GETTING IDEAS ONTO PAPER					
Tells a rich story aloud, but writes only a few short, simple sentences	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Forgets capital letters, full stops or word endings, even when they know the rule	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Avoids writing tasks, or erases and restarts so often that little gets done	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
MOTHER TONGUE AND CONFIDENCE					
Struggles to read or remember characters or words in Mother Tongue as well as in English	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Seems tired, frustrated or upset after reading and writing, or says they are "stupid"	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Does noticeably better in oral tasks and discussions than in anything written	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What to do with your answers

This checklist does not produce a score or a result. It helps you notice patterns. If you marked "Often" or "Very often" across several sections for a term or more, bring this sheet to a conversation with your child's teacher, the school's SEN officer, or a qualified professional.

Important: This checklist was developed by Strugglesmart as a general awareness tool for parents, informed by publicly available information on reading and writing difficulties (including dyslexia and dysgraphia). It is **not a validated clinical or psychometric instrument**, and it cannot diagnose any learning difficulty. Only a qualified professional, such as an educational psychologist, can provide a diagnosis through a proper assessment.

If this feels familiar: *what can help* at home

Practical, low-pressure ideas to try alongside, not instead of, professional support.

Make reading less tiring

Share the load

- Take turns reading pages, or read together aloud at the same time (paired reading)
- Use audiobooks for stories above their reading level, so they still enjoy books
- Re-read favourite books. Repetition builds speed and confidence

Help the eyes keep their place

- Use a ruler or a card with a window cut out to show one line at a time
- Try larger print, more spacing, or a cream background instead of bright white
- Keep reading sessions short: 10 to 15 focused minutes beats 45 tired ones

Spelling and handwriting

Multisensory spelling

- Say each sound while writing it, trace it in sand or on the table, then write it again
- Learn words in families (light, night, right) instead of random lists
- A few words a day works better than a long list the night before the test

Take pressure off the hand

- Try a pencil grip, a chunky pencil, or paper with wider lines
- Warm up hands first: playdough, squeezing a ball, a few finger stretches
- From upper primary, start learning to type, which can help with longer work

Talk it, then write it: let your child say their answer or story aloud first, record it or jot key words for them, then write. Separating "having ideas" from "getting them onto paper" often shows how much they really know.

Protect how your child feels about learning

In the moment

- Praise effort and ideas, not neat handwriting or perfect spelling
- Mark ideas and spelling separately when you help with compositions
- Avoid asking them to read aloud in front of others if it upsets them

The bigger picture

- Dyslexia has nothing to do with intelligence. Many children with it are bright, creative thinkers
- Many children make real progress with the right teaching and support over time
- In national exams, children with a diagnosis may qualify for support such as extra time or a reader pen

Wondering about support at school and in exams? Strugglesmart helps parents check reports and plan exam Access Arrangements (extra time, a reader, a word processor) for PSLE and GCE, in English or 华文.

Free first call: strugglesmart.sg/contact

More free parent checklists and toolkits: strugglesmart.sg/toolkits

Considering a formal assessment? In Singapore, the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS) offers Specific Learning Differences (SpLD) assessments. You can send an enquiry via their website: das.org.sg/services/spld-assessment/. You can also ask your child's school about seeing an educational psychologist.

A reminder: these are general suggestions, not a treatment plan. Every child's needs are different, and a formal assessment can help tailor strategies to your child.