Lucid Psychology
Narges Izadi, M.S., LEP, ABSNP

The Forensic Lens - Uncovering Hidden Indicators of Dyslexia and Reading Deficits in Psychoeducational Reports

A White Paper for Attorneys, Advocates, and Professionals Supporting Twice-Exceptional Students

Author: Narges Izadi
Licensed Educational Psychologist, Diplomate in School Neuropsychology

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The "Average Score" Trap: Why Standard Reports Often Miss the Mark

In the legal and advocacy landscape, a psychoeducational report is often treated as a binary document: either the scores qualify a student for services, or they do not. However, for the student with dyslexia - particularly the "twice-exceptional" or intellectually gifted student - the standard score table is frequently a mask rather than a mirror.

A student may achieve a standard score of 90 (the 25th percentile) on a reading subtest, which schools often categorize as "Low Average" or "within limits." What the summary table fails to capture is the neurocognitive cost of that score. If a student required five minutes to decode a passage that their peers finish in ninety seconds, or if they utilized heavy context-clue guessing to bypass a fundamental deficit in phonological processing, that "average" score is clinically significant.

To effectively advocate for appropriate intervention, one must look beyond the generic narrative and identify the subtle, underrated patterns of dyslexic symptomatology hidden within the data.

1. The Neurocognitive Architecture: The "Why" Behind the Struggle

Understanding reading requires moving beyond "Basic Reading Skills" as a monolithic category. We must look at the Dual-Route Model:

- The Sub-lexical Route (Phonological): The "sounding out" pathway. Breakdowns here manifest as difficulty with nonsense words (pseudowords) and phoneme manipulation.
- The Lexical Route (Orthographic): The "sight word" pathway. Breakdowns here manifest as a failure to build a visual word lexicon, leading to slow, laborious reading of irregular words (e.g., "colonel" or "yacht").

When an examiner misses the distinction between these two, the resulting IEP goals are often generic and ineffective.

2. Underrated Qualitative Indicators: Reading the "Testing Observations"

The Testing Observations section is arguably the most critical part of a report, yet it is often the most overlooked. Look for these "hidden" clinical markers:

- Sub-vocalizing and Humming: Does the student whisper to themselves during silent reading? This indicates an inability to access the lexical route; they are forced to "hear" the word to recognize it, a significant drain on cognitive energy.
- The "Fatigue Factor": Does the student's performance plummet in the second half of the battery? Dyslexic brains expend significantly more glucose and neural energy to decode. Rapidly declining accuracy is a quantitative marker of a neurocognitive inefficiency.
- Self-Corrections: A high rate of self-correction is often praised as "good monitoring," but in a clinical context, it frequently signals a breakdown in Orthographic Mapping. The student is guessing based on the first letter and then "fixing" it once the sentence doesn't make sense.

3. Surprising Places to Find Dyslexic Patterns

A. The Sensory-Motor & Cerebellum Connection

- We often view motor skills as separate from reading. However, the cerebellum coordinates

both fine motor movements and the timing of speech/reading.

- **What to look for:** Low scores in visual-Motor Integration (VMI) or qualitative notes about poor "eye teaming" or "tracking." If a student's eyes cannot perform smooth saccades (the jumps between words), they will lose their place, skip lines, and experience "fluency" issues that are actually motor-based.

B. Auditory Processing vs. Phonological Awareness

- A student may pass a basic hearing screening but have an Auditory Processing Disorder (APD).
- The Hidden Pattern: Look for "Hypersensitivity to Sound" in the parent interview or BASC-3 data.

If a student cannot filter background noise (auditory figure-ground), they cannot isolate the discrete phonemes (sounds) necessary for orthographic mapping. This is a "Language by Ear" deficit that directly precedes a "Language by Eye" (reading) failure.

C. The Executive Function "Bottleneck"

Working Memory is the bottleneck of the reading process.

- The Hidden Pattern: Compare Digit Span Forward (simple rote memory) with Digit Span Backward or Letter-Number Sequencing (working memory). A significant drop in the latter indicates that the student cannot hold phonemes in their mind long enough to blend them into a word. This is not an "attention" issue; it is a structural processing deficit.

D. Rapid Automatized Naming (RAN): The "Crystal Ball"

RAN (the speed at which a student can name colors, objects, or letters) is one of the most underrated predictors of reading fluency.

- What the examiner misses: Even if a student's decoding is accurate, a low RAN score indicates a Retrieval Fluency deficit. The brain cannot "pull" the verbal label for a visual symbol quickly enough. These students are often denied services because they are "accurate," but they will never achieve the automaticity required for high-school-level reading volumes.

4. Reading Beyond the Scores: A Checklist for Advocates

When reviewing a report, ask the following:

- Timed vs. Untimed Discrepancies: Did the student score significantly lower on the GORT-5 (Timed) than on the WJ-IV Letter-Word Identification (Untimed)? If so, the student has a "fluency" disability that the school is likely ignoring.
- Nonsense Word Performance: How did the student perform on Pseudoword Decoding? This is the purest measure of the phonological pathway. If this is low, the student lacks the "tools" to read any word they haven't already memorized.
- Articulation History: Does the Background History mention early speech-language services? Dyslexia is a language-based disorder. Early "phonological loop" issues in speech almost always migrate into reading issues in second grade.
- The "Gifted" Mask: If the student has a Verbal Comprehension Index (VCI) of 120 but a Reading Fluency score of 95, that 25-point gap is a "hidden" disability, even though 95 is "average."

Conclusion

A psychoeducational report is a map of a student's neural efficiency. To secure the "Appropriate" in FAPE, we must stop accepting "Average" scores at face value. By identifying the breakdowns in the neurocognitive pathways - from the cerebellum's motor control to the temporal lobe's phonological store - we can move beyond generic labels and secure the targeted, multisensory interventions these students require.

About the Author

Narges Izadi is a Licensed Educational Psychologist and Diplomate in School Neuropsychology with extensive experience evaluating twice-exceptional students and those with complex social-emotional profiles. She specializes in bridging data and narrative to uncover the full picture of a learner's needs.

References

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