

Not dumb, dyslexic

Having a learning disorder doesn't make you stupid and it won't stop you from becoming a success. Need proof? Just take a look at some of your fave stars.

Celebs have it too

High school wasn't the best time for Tom Cruise. "I'd try to concentrate on what I was reading, then I'd get to the end of the page and have very little memory of anything I'd read. I'd go blank, feel anxious, nervous, bored, dumb," he says. But the Hollywood hottie wasn't dumb, he had dyslexia.

One of the biggest problems with dyslexia is that you can't tell a person has it just by looking at them. Dyslexics are great at hiding their weaknesses: sometimes they're the class clown, sometimes the daydreamer and almost always they're brilliant in other areas like art, drama, music or sport.

While most people use words to process information, dyslexics are much more visual. Brenda Baird, a teacher at Dyslexia Australia, says most dyslexics are picture thinkers. "If we don't have a picture for the meaning of a word, it's like sitting in front of a TV and having the screen turn off and on." So people with dyslexia might jumble letters, numbers and words (like confusing the word "dog" with "god"), or only see words that they can link to a picture.

Keira Knightley, the gorgeous star of *Pirates Of The Caribbean* and *King Arthur* knows all about this. She says she was "called stupid a lot" because she used to



Both Keira and Tom (inset) have worked out ways to read their lines.



write numbers backwards, and couldn't read some words. Now she can read all her lines and gets to pash Orlando Bloom, who's dyslexic, too!

Some kids drop out of school because they're made to feel totally stupid. Richard Branson (king of the Virgin empire) was smacked by his teachers for bad grades and a bad attitude. He dropped out of school at 16 because of his dyslexia - now he owns his own island!

Dealing with dyslexia

Dyslexia is one of the most common learning difficulties, and it's most likely to be hereditary. If you're having difficulty at school, Brenda says the first step is to get some help. "Understand that there is a reason for your struggles," she advises.

Dyslexia Australia teaches the Davis Dyslexia Correction Program, which helps dyslexics make pictures for all their non-picture words. It has a 97% success rate.

The future is bright

The reason a lot of dyslexics become super-successful is that while they may not be good with wordy details, they're great at grasping the bigger picture and coming up with original ideas. To compensate for the trouble they have with words, people with dyslexia are usually very imaginative and curious about how things work. So it's no surprise they're usually very good at anything creative - just look at Keira, Tom, Orlando and Richard.

40 ways a person with dyslexia might read the word "cat"

CAT	TAD	IVD	CVL
CAT	TAC	IVC	CVL
CAL	IAD	CAV	CVL
ACT	TCA	ICV	VCL
ACT	TCA	ACT	ICV
ACT	TCA	VCA	ICV
ATC	CTA	VIC	CVL
CTA	ATC	CVL	VCA
AVC	ATC	VCA	CVL
VTC	CTA	AVL	CLA

(FROM THE GIFT OF DYSLLEXIA BY RONALD D. DAVIS)

Beatrice, 16, reckons she has a gift!

"I found out I had dyslexia eight years ago. At the time, my reading and writing were terrible. My teachers thought I was thick and absent-minded, and kids laughed at my mistakes.

"After a while my mum took me to a learning psychologist and we discovered the real problem. I struggle with visual processing, which

is writing down what I see or what someone says, and I usually spell things phonetically [by how they sound]. To keep up, I study for four hours a night and I'm now in the advanced program at school.

"Dyslexia is just a different perspective on learning that doesn't fit with modern teaching. Even after I was diagnosed, I had trouble getting teachers to understand it. They'd ask me if I was sure I had dyslexia - like I was

making it up! It is a pain but now I consider my dyslexia a gift. They say Einstein was dyslexic and probably Shakespeare, too!"



Weblink

Need help or want more info? Go to www.dyslexia-australia.com or call 07 33413471