

This year CifA and Mentoring for Womxn in Archaeology and Heritage (MWAH) have been exploring the potential impacts that dyslexia and other neurodiverse conditions have upon archaeologists, from those who are diagnosed, or feel they are a candidate for the conditions, and from those who work with these individuals.

From 5 – 11 October CifA took part in Dyslexia Awareness Week and we would like to say a huge thank you to all the individuals and organisations who have helped us to raise awareness about dyslexia, how it can impact our work and what can be put in place to support dyslexic colleagues. We have collated all the contributions from the last week in the pages below.

Archaeologists with dyslexia can be incredibly valuable assets to our workforce who should be celebrated and not dismissed. There are many simple changes that can be put in place to support dyslexic colleagues, and in fact many of these would benefit all archaeologists. Moving forward, we will continue to develop our [neurodiversity and archaeological practice webpage](#) which includes case studies, experiences, research and useful links. This also feeds in to CifA's wider work on equality and diversity in archaeology.

We would welcome more good practice case studies to add to this resource so please contact us at alex.llewellyn@archaeologists.net

*Dyslexia
is my
superpower!*
*#dyslexiacreates
#dyslexicarch*

Dyslexia sucks. Growing up with it and not knowing why I wasn't as good as everyone else was lousy. To be told by my teachers that dyslexia does not exist or that it cannot be taken into account, was worse.

I got help by the age of 19. I had to catch up on all educational qualifications. Studying archaeology gives me a lot of pleasure. Since I read a little slower than other people, it always takes me a little longer. But it helps if the articles are interesting. Nevertheless, I still avoid writing on boards in public.

Working in archaeology has a few problems. In the beginning I did not tell my bosses that I was dyslexic as I was afraid of not getting the job or of losing it. But of course, they notice it after a while. But I was always lucky to find acceptance.

Drawing attention to dyslexia in archaeology could help give those affected more time in the study and can ensure acceptance. But it will always be a little more work for those affected than for everyone else.



Jeffrey König

www.archaeologists.net/practices/neurodiversity

"I was diagnosed with dyslexia at high school and have since gained a BA and MA and am now writing my PhD at the Institute for Near Eastern Archaeology.

In the past I tended to just ignore that I have dyslexia. I always asked my friends to correct my text during the studies (I am very thankful for them!) and just went on with everything. I now realise this was a mistake and to help raise awareness for others, I am in contact to some teachers and speak with them regularly about how to treat children with dyslexia. I also know other people with dyslexia in academia and I share my experience with them. The biggest mistake is that I thought dyslexia is perceived as stupidity but my experience is that normally people are interested and open. I still would not mention it in a job interview, but if you keep it secret all the time, things will never change."

#DyslexicArch #DyslexiaCreates

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By raising awareness of dyslexia in archaeology we hope to instigate change to support colleagues to stay in our profession.

"My dyslexia affects me mainly regarding reading and writing. It was spotted whilst I was at Uni, so I already had some coping strategies in place ... namely taking a LONG time to read and write.

In the environment of a commercial unit, this was really stressful. I didn't really understand how to write reports, the process of making things flow, I struggle to keep a logical argument and be short and to the point. All these things are exactly what you don't want in commercial reports, so it was always a real battle and struggle for me to get my reporting done. Whilst my managers were supportive, eventually, the lack of regular appraisals, or any training or guidance on report writing made the whole experience really unpleasant. Because of this, I'm not sure I'd return to commercial archaeology, unless I really had to."

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Dyslexia is not a new phenomenon; the value of dyslexia in the workplace is something dyslexia charities and think tanks have championed in recent years. Initiatives like 'Made by Dyslexia' showcase high-profile case studies promoting the advantages of having dyslexia – recognising that in fact it can be a 'superpower'.

Responses to our recent dyslexia and archaeology survey highlighted individuals' strengths in spatial awareness, problem solving, seeing different angles/scenarios in situations, excellent long-term memory, digital visualising skills, communication and more. All of these skills make excellent archaeologists!

Going forward we need figureheads, role models and mentoring to change the cultural perceptions of dyslexia in archaeology and to support dyslexic archaeologists to advance in their careers.

Cara Jones
Cifa



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My dyslexia diagnosis came from my University assessor realising I cannot sequence concepts, words, letters or numbers, and that I rely on memory for how something should look, feel or sound when writing. On complicated archaeological features it took me a long time to verbally explain what was occurring, even though in my head 'I understood'. This would often lead to assumptions that I was incompetent or inexperienced and so I would be treated as such.



Being undiagnosed during my time in fieldwork meant there was no support. During a brief period where I worked with my husband, he was able to create pro-forma sheets for me, or at least give me a list of what information I needed to include, including the terminology and why it was important. Standardised industry pro-forma sheets across all CiFA Registered Organisations, including prompts, drawing conventions and a terminology glossary would be useful!
You can read Amy's full story on the website link below.

Amy Talbot

Mentoring Women in Archaeology and Heritage

www.archaeologists.net/practices/neurodiversity

"Being dyslexic is a fundamental part of who I am. It makes me empathetic, creative and I have an incredible long-term memory."

When I got my first job, I struggled with drawing plans and sections. It took a project officer on a site to realise that my brain was not registering the blue squares on Permatrace. He made me a red board; problem solved... almost. On a bad day it still feels like 'Baby Shark' is playing on one side of my brain as someone plays the cymbals on the other. When it is safe, I put on my headphones and listen to an audio book; this switches off the part of my brain that is angry and noisy and allows me to do my job effectively.



Rosie Loftus

Mentoring Women in
Archaeology and Heritage

You can read Rosie's full story on the website link below.

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I was not formally assessed as being dyslexic until I was 30, at the time I was working as a site assistant and was being asked to undertake desk-based assessments. Whilst it did not help with writing or my shocking approach to spelling it unlocked a different set of perspectives on my skills and abilities. It allowed me to look beyond the surface issues to a deeper more reassured understanding of who I am and what I want to achieve.

I now understand I just think differently, view things differently and make different spatial and visual relationships and connections. I think openly through talking and map solutions via pictures in my head. I believe this translate into how I think about places and our connections to them. Understanding these attributes of who I am is very liberating – my dyslexia does not hold me back - it drives me forward.



Neil Redfern

Executive Director, CBA

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My dyslexia was only really recognised and defined by the time I got to Sixth Form College. My coping strategies were so effective that my poor spelling was just put down to being a 'bad speller and writer'. I can still hear teachers saying 'sound it out and spell it'. I just cannot process the sounds in my brain.

University was worse, lecturers telling me coping strategies were 'not good enough' and wondering why extra time in exams was needed. That was a real low point.

So much of the output in archaeology is written, be it context cards or reports. Expectations are high. What reassures me is that my current employer really understands how difficult and frustrating dyslexia can be for me.

When pointed out I can see errors in my writing but in that moment it takes me back to being a school boy and standing at the teacher's desk, my work covered in red pen.

Dyslexia is a broad condition and so varied, what I hope for is acceptance and no fear of letting people know that I am a dyslexic.

www.archaeologists.net/practices/neurodiversity

1. There needs to be more training and support so people can get a clearer understanding of dyslexia
2. We should be looking at staff teams as a collective, identifying everyone's strengths and weaknesses and developing the whole team around these
3. We should focus more on improving our strengths rather than trying to address our weaknesses
4. We need more dyslexic role models in archaeology at all levels and at all stages of their career
5. There is a need for more discussion as a sector
6.we need another tea break on this topic!

#DyslexicArch #DyslexiaCreates

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"I can't even begin to tell you how many times it takes me just to log into my computer some days!"

Upon joining Air Photo Services (APS), having colleagues who were also dyslexic gave me a chance to be open about the difficulties I face dealing with GIS Data and put in place some suggestions and ways to limit the errors it could cause. It also meant for the first time being able to really see it from another dyslexic person's point of view and learn more about my own coping mechanisms and hurdles.

You can read the full Dyslexia Awareness case study from Adam and Air Photo Services on the website link below.



Adam Jarvis, ACiFA
Air Photo Services

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"Although enabled archaeology is becoming a prominent topic, we still need to work harder to promote open discussions, disability awareness and look at how we can better make adjustments.

We can and should adapt our practices to be able to be more inclusive and supportive for disabled people in the workplace as anyone can develop or realise a disability at any time in life."



Sarahjayne Clements
ACiFA

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