

## Possible SEN, ESL, & Cultural Explanations for Learning Difficulties

Characteristic	Possible SEN Causes	Possible Second Language Acquisition & Cultural Causes
1. Omits words or adds words to a sentence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trying to read too quickly</li> <li>• Weak fluency</li> <li>• careless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Articles, prepositions, pronouns are not used in first language</li> <li>• Picture clues are used as reading strategy</li> <li>• Cultural content may be unfamiliar – no direct translation</li> </ul>
2. Frequently forgets common words taught from one day to the next.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak short term memory</li> <li>• Weak decoding skills</li> <li>• Limited vocabulary knowledge</li> <li>• Limited language experiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Word context is unfamiliar</li> <li>• Word meaning is abstract, unfamiliar</li> <li>• Words have not been practiced orally or sufficiently contextualized</li> <li>• Quantity of language overload</li> </ul>
3. Becomes easily distracted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADD/ ADHD</li> <li>• Hearing difficulties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental fatigue &amp; sensory overload</li> <li>• Trying to make sense of surroundings</li> <li>• Lack of formal education and cultural differences in schooling</li> <li>• Culture shock, anxiety, insecurity</li> </ul>
4. Cannot commit multiplication facts to memory.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak working memory</li> <li>• Difficulty seeing patterns and making connections</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The specific Math language is unfamiliar</li> <li>• Method of teaching tables is culturally unfamiliar</li> <li>• Information overload</li> </ul>
5. Has trouble following directions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• C.A.P. (Central Auditory Processing) difficulties:</li> <li>• Difficulty processing multiple messages</li> <li>• Slow to process information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doesn't understand the expectations</li> <li>• Routines are different and culturally unfamiliar</li> <li>• Directions are not broken down or chunked into steps</li> </ul>

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6. Doesn't grasp cause and effect relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of experience with environment around them</li> <li>• Has not been taught this</li> <li>• Impulsive behaviour (does not plan ahead)</li> <li>• FAS (fetal alcohol syndrome)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiar with rote learning; little exposure to higher order thinking skills</li> <li>• Limited expressive English language to articulate reasons</li> <li>• Emotional disconnection due to prior traumatic experiences</li> </ul>
7. Doesn't see patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spatial awareness difficulties</li> <li>• Difficulty with logistics</li> <li>• Learning disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of exposure to making patterns</li> <li>• Lack of English to understand instruction or explain the pattern</li> <li>• Unfamiliar concept (size, rotation)</li> </ul>
8. Can do rote arithmetic on paper, but cannot solve problems related to daily life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty applying concepts or skills learned</li> <li>• Global cognitive delays</li> <li>• Weak reasoning skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The content of the question may be culturally embedded (e.g. create a garden border)</li> <li>• Wording results in high vocabulary demands</li> </ul>
9. Avoids writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor pencil grip or spatial awareness</li> <li>• Difficulty organizing &amp; transferring thoughts on paper</li> <li>• Difficulty with writing conventions, ie. Grammar, punctuation, etc.</li> <li>• Perfectionist (afraid to make a mistake)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usually the last skill to develop</li> <li>• Not understood writing expectations</li> <li>• Task is too open ended - no scaffolding in place</li> <li>• Lack of vocabulary knowledge</li> <li>• Lack of form knowledge – could be culturally embedded (eg. Recipe)</li> <li>• Gaps in education</li> </ul>
10. Poorly organized/ desk is a mess	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak executive functioning skills</li> <li>• ADHD</li> <li>• Impulsive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overwhelmed with the materials</li> <li>• Unfamiliar expectations – not had a desk before</li> <li>• Fatigue, hoarding due to trauma</li> </ul>

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11. Doesn't transfer learning from one lesson to another. Has to relearn each concept from scratch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak working memory</li> <li>• Global cognitive delays</li> <li>• Slow to process information</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information overload</li> <li>• Concepts are too abstract or culturally unfamiliar – no prior knowledge</li> <li>• Gaps in education – ELD factors</li> <li>• Acculturation process – early level</li> <li>• Limited vocabulary in first language</li> </ul>
12. Very literal – misses inferences, subtleties, nuances and innuendoes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-verbal learning disability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage 1&amp;2 – English language is ltd.</li> <li>• Stage 3 – literal English language. Nuances &amp; idioms need support</li> <li>• Culturally bound sayings; e.g. “like a bull in a china shop”</li> </ul>
13. Does not hear fine differences in words, writes pin for pen.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak or underdeveloped phonemic awareness and linguistic skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some sounds may not exist, or may be different in first language</li> <li>• Placing of tongue may be challenging</li> <li>• Rate and clarity of teacher's speaking</li> <li>• Context needs to be given – word may sound the same</li> </ul>
14. Forgets names of things that s/he knows. Has to describe them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech difficulties</li> <li>• Poor hearing or listening skills</li> <li>• Limited experiences to build vocabulary</li> <li>• Weak memory skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of practice or application of new vocabulary</li> <li>• General vocabulary overload</li> <li>• Specific nouns have to be described</li> <li>• No knowledge of root, suffix, prefix</li> </ul>
15. Often understands concepts, but can't do it in written symbolic form with paper and pencil.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak fine motor skills</li> <li>• Difficulty applying writing conventions</li> <li>• Difficulty organizing and transferring thoughts to paper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different alphabet/ language direction</li> <li>• Stage 1 – little or no writing practice</li> <li>• Cultural “high achieving” factor</li> <li>• Different sentence structure, lack of vocab.</li> </ul>

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16. Freezes when asked to perform on demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shy with authority or adults</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Self-conscious among class mates</li> <li>• Afraid of being wrong</li> <li>• Slow to process information (not sure what is being asked)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not understand the expectations</li> <li>• Scared or intimidated</li> <li>• Overwhelmed by the expectations</li> <li>• Does not have sufficient receptive language</li> </ul>
17. Has limited sight word memory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak decoding skills</li> <li>• Not a visual learner</li> <li>• Does not retain “looking for clues” skills</li> <li>• Weak short term memory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different script in first language</li> <li>• Not literate in first language; no word transfer</li> <li>• Sight words are abstract as they’ve not been practiced/ contextualized</li> </ul>
18. Learns from watching, not listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good visual learner</li> <li>• Weak auditory learner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Normal for ELLs</li> <li>• Visual learner</li> <li>• Looks for visual confirmation rather than oral feedback</li> </ul>
19. Can’t categorize, classify, or summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak organizational skills</li> <li>• Difficulty seeing similarities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize is Stage 4 ESL expectation, categorize is Stage 2.</li> <li>• Cultural experiences may not have encouraged this</li> <li>• Concept or expectations are not clear</li> <li>• Unfamiliar tools used to classify, categorize</li> </ul>
20. Can’t retell a story in sequence or summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak comprehension skills</li> <li>• Language delay</li> <li>• Weak memory/ focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of vocabulary, especially sequencing words</li> <li>• Unfamiliar or culturally bound story content</li> <li>• Fear of failure or making mistakes</li> </ul>

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21. Confuses b,d,p, and q. Confuses order of letters in word; was for saw	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning disability (dyslexia)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different alphabet or letter script</li> <li>• Different direction of print</li> <li>• Letters have a different sound in first language</li> </ul>
22. Low frustration tolerance. Gives up easily or explodes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ADHD</li> <li>• Work is too difficult</li> <li>• Is not being processed according to ability</li> <li>• Anger management difficulties</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culture shock, stress, emotional strain, trauma</li> <li>• Frustration of lack of expressive speech or inability to deal with peer pressure</li> <li>• Can't communicate true knowledge</li> <li>• Work is too easy or too hard</li> </ul>
23. Doesn't hear the sequence of sounds in a word and writes isolated parts of it; <i>amil</i> for <i>animal</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Speech/ language difficulties</li> <li>• Weak phonetic skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening comprehension still developing</li> <li>• Teacher speaks too fast</li> <li>• Unfamiliar word/s</li> <li>• Speech and accent influence spelling and sequencing of letters</li> </ul>
24. Has trouble seeing (verbal/visual) similarities and differences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hearing – phonetic delays, linguistic delays</li> <li>• Seeing – vision difficulties, careless, not taking care to examine item</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different alphabet, script, or direction of print</li> <li>• Developing auditory skills</li> <li>• Word or object is unfamiliar and not been practised before</li> </ul>
25. Has handwriting difficulty. Writes very slow	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weak fine motor skills</li> <li>• A physical reason</li> <li>• Poor pencil grip</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELD – limited writing experiences</li> <li>• Fear of mistakes</li> <li>• Challenge of new vocabulary</li> </ul>

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<p>26. Reads without expression</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning difficulties</li> <li>• Weak fluency (concentrating on decoding words)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of modelled reading in English</li> <li>• Too busy decoding to think about expression</li> <li>• Not familiar with all punctuation or text features</li> <li>• Inexperience of reading aloud</li> <li>• Lack of comprehension and new vocabulary</li> </ul>