



*Wish you were there?*

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TURKISH

*Çok iyi ve güzel bir tatil  
geçirdiyim. Hepinizi çok özledik  
keşke burada bizimle olsaydınız  
görüşmek üzere bye-bye.*



POSTA PRIORITARIA  
Priority Mail

*Lieve.*

DUTCH

*Heerlijk weer, heerlijk eten en prachtige  
omgeving. Het was leuker geweest zijn  
als jullie er ook geweest waren.  
weel lief Toosje + x*

FRENCH

*Passer d'excellentes vacances  
ce sera un plaisir  
de pouvoir les partager  
avec vous*

*A bientôt*

*Brigitte*



\*\*\*70PTS



**'Handwriting speaks sense in a language all nations understand'**

*With apologies to Alphra Behn (1640-1689)*

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# Treating Writing Disorders:

## *A Case Study of Developmental Gerstmann's Syndrome*

Part 2

by Pamela Heather

### Seeking Employment

It was difficult to sign on at the Job Bureau because of my difficulty of just holding a pen; a hand tremor also made my signature difficult to read. The officers constantly queried my signature until I became a regular! Visits to the Job Bureau to claim for unemployment benefit became a way of life. The thought of how smug and satisfied my teachers would feel if they could see me, often passed through my mind. After twelve years of unemployment, I accepted that work was not an option for me.

A large amount of unfilled time allows a person time to analyse and contemplate their life, or lack of it. Some people might have thought I was unapproachable. I became a loner because of my difficulties, and lacked confidence to do what most people take for granted, such as socialising. Also, having no money meant I could not socialise and there was nothing worth living for in this world.

A lifetime of negative feedback had destroyed my self-esteem. My experiences left me with such emotions, ranging from suicide to long hours of depression that the past preyed on my mind. It is unexplainable why I have not had a serious breakdown.

### Looking for Answers

In January 1998, my brother offered help and suggested I seek a dyslexia assessment. The psychologist found I had a wide range of disorders. Dyspraxia was the main focus of concern. First, there was the elation of finding out that I had real problems, then bitterness and anger followed. The education system had failed me.

After a couple of months, I plucked up courage and rang the Nottingham Dyspraxia Trust to seek advice. They sent a leaflet on **The Learn-Write Centre** who help people with my difficulties. Initially sceptical, thinking no one could help me with my lifelong problems, an appointment was made.

At the first session, my handwriting disorder and hand tremor were both effectively treated. I worked my way through various kinds of writing tools. The next treatment concentrated on simple, structured ways to write essays. Although I hardly ever wrote anything at school, it was a surprise to discover my spelling ability had improved after the handwriting treatment. The tests undertaken at the Centre revealed I had **Scotopic Sensitivity**, and the final Teaching Treatment enabled me to read the printed word.

All my life, I have been unable to read more than a few lines because of glare coming off a printed page, which increases once the print begins to swirl. A coloured filter placed on a frame, above the page, cut out all the anomalies and enabled me to read.

From the age of five, the feeling that I could not mentally function, eventually led to such anguish that I wanted to take my own life. I never thought it possible that someone could give me the confidence to read and write. Without people like Pamela Heather, who has dedicated her working life to finding out the answers to reading and writing disorders, I would not be writing this today.

simple action of reading my work, of holding a pen is now possible for people like me. In my late twenties, I'm just getting to know myself. There is hope this sense of worth will continue, and I'm far more positive than several months ago. It is my wish to do something with my life and to prove they were all wrong about me.

#### The 'After' Writing Sample

— the first week, after working with a series of writing tools

not written at all for for the last majority of my life. then any amount of writing is an improvement than being analysed in this context. During the week I have probably written more than I can remember. Although I personally feel there is a need for improvement, hopefully with more help I will feel totally confident in my writing ability and my life can now start and

The first objective is to work around, and to counteract the physical and physiological deficits that inhibit the production of mechanical writing. Untreated, they will delay or impair the development of written language. The choice of letter form aims to address and to counteract special, kinaesthetic and phonemic graphias. A benign hand tremor or arrhythmia (jerky movements) can be eliminated or greatly reduced. Immediate improvements are both seen and felt by students.

A prescriptive handwriting style contains letters chosen from the Italian Hand, the Round Hand and the Commercial Hand practised from 1750 to the 1900s, with modifications. For students aged ten and over, the longhand change occurs over a two-week period, involving two visits and seven hours of practice.

After one week, a student's poor movement and poor working memory for writing show improvements. It takes around a month usually, to achieve writing automaticity. The prescribed letter movements for the style must be kept until they transfer into long-term memory.

Students who undertake prescriptive teaching treatments can learn ways of working around their disorders and go on to achieve in life. They quickly improve their standards in written English and stay the course in further and higher education. The speed of writing increases for most, but not all students; some will need additional time concessions in examinations.

Aidan mastered a prescribed handwriting style and controlled his benign hand tremor after only twelve hours of tuition and three visits to the Centre. He undertook two more teaching treatments, involving another twelve hours of tuition. Recently, he successfully completed an Access Course and he hopes to take a degree course in counselling work or social work.

#### Second Week

— tremor occurs only on very large letters - with the chosen fountain pen

TALK FOR THE DYSPRAXIA TRUST  
My name is Ashley Schofield I am 28 years old. I am here today to talk about my difficulties and the effect they have had on my life.  
I first realised I had a problem when I started Infant School at the age of five. Even at this early stage of schooling, I realised I was different to other children. Not just because I was from a mixed race relationship which could be a problem but also because I seemed to do things differently in comparison to other children.

#### PRESCRIPTIVE HANDWRITING

The Learn-Write Centre's reputation has steadily grown because of the success rate of Teaching Treatments, which are copyrighted. It is the first establishment to combine a teaching method with a prescriptive approach for working around *dysgraphia*. Many students travel to Nottingham from abroad, by recommendation.

During the initial assessment stage of students' performance skills, specific teaching objectives are set. Learn-Write Teaching treatments start to counteract a student's writing disorder via a Prescriptive Handwriting Treatment. Other treatments, for the improvement of reading, organisational skills, grammar and spelling, are a need for most SLD students.

#### SUMMARY

Current remedial methods are patents for failure for many students because untreated writing disorders remain to inhibit their future prospects and choice of career. The expectation is that students should write well despite the existence of *dysgraphia*.

Aidan's Prescriptive Handwriting Treatment countered *dysgraphia* and restored the grammatical feature of the word being written. It worked around his

hand tremor. A very dark coloured filter, placed above the reading page, countered his severe degree of scotopic sensitivity. He reads and writes extremely well, but his poor concentration, his inability to read at length and to write at speed act as inhibitors. Gerstmann students may require a reader, a writer and a time extension for examinations because of slow recall processing, attention deficits, a hand grasp or tremor difficulty, and scotopic sensitivity.

Just & Carpenter (1987) classify the symptoms of Gerstmann's under *Alexia with Agraphia* as 'acquired' dyslexia because it typically involves reading, with writing and spelling problems. It appears they acknowledge the group of symptoms that Gerstmann discovered in his research of learning disabilities, but disagree that it is a 'developmental' disorder. However, Aidan's free writing sample taken after the Prescriptive Handwriting Treatment, and his excellent reading skills using a coloured filter, show he does not have 'acquired' dyslexia. His results suggest that *Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome* and *Attention Deficits* should be added to Gerstmann's list of symptoms. Luria (1987) was right to question the deeper roots of Gerstmann's.

The Moser Report (1999) revealed 20% of nineteen year olds in the UK were illiterate. Current statistics on illiteracy levels, and the results of this new approach, suggest a rethink of remedial provision for SLD students. An opportunity to address writing disorders is here; it enables SLD students to learn, study and to express themselves through the written word.

Wilson (1998) appraised the human hand: *We have come to a point where we can more fully sense the convergence of the neurologic, linguistic, developmental, and anthropologic perspectives in our search for an understanding of the role of the human hand. More particularly, it prepares us to consider how we do, or how we might, develop our own unseen, dormant, knowing, praxic, inventive hand and put it to our own personal and expressive use – to make it speak, and ourselves more articulate.*

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## About the author:

Pamela Heather, retired Head Teacher of several special schools, is in private practice at The Learn-Write Centre, Long Eaton, Nottingham. She offers Prescriptive Handwriting and other teaching treatments, which compensate for the movement and memory problems encountered by students who have a writing dysfunction allied to: Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Dysgraphia, Gerstmann Syndrome, ADHD, DAMP, Asperger's Syndrome and Sensory Aphasia.

*Qualifications: Diploma for Teachers of Handicapped Children in Schools and Hospitals (1962), Teaching Diploma (1965), Postgraduate Diploma for Research in Remedial and Caring Practice (1997).*

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*Loretta Scott has given permission to reproduce quotes and references from: Dysgraphia: 'Why Johnny Can't Write', by Diana Walton Cavey. Dr Frank Wilson, author of 'The Hand', has also given permission for the quote from his book.*

## A Little Poem Regarding Computer Spell-Checkers

*Eye halve a spelling chequer  
It came with my pea sea  
It plainly marques four my revue  
Miss steaks eye kin knot sea.*

*Eye strike a key and type a word  
And weight four it two say  
Weather eye am wrong oar write  
It shows me strait a weigh*

*As soon as a mist ache is maid  
It nose bee fore two long  
And eye can put the error rite  
Its rare lea ever wrong.*

*Eye have run this poem threw it  
I am shore your pleased two no  
Its letter perfect awl the weigh  
My chequer tolled me so!*

(Sue, who is Pam Heather's administrator, found this on the Internet)

