



DICKON ADDIS

Financial Wizard &
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SCHOOL

At Primary School, whilst I was good at mathematics and was active in class discussions, I struggled with reading and writing. Spelling tests were embarrassing as too often I couldn't remember the spelling of words that had just been taught in class. When we had to read out aloud, I would long for the class bell to ring and thus avoid my turn to read out loud.

My mother was so frustrated with my reading speeds that she once took me to the library and allowed me to choose any book as long as I read it end-to-end. Probably more to annoy her, I choose three Tintin comic books, to my surprise, she didn't send me back to choose another set. This was the moment that started a lifetime love of reading. I quickly moved onto to 'proper' books and would get totally lost in my own imaginary world, all inspired by the stories that I was now reading.

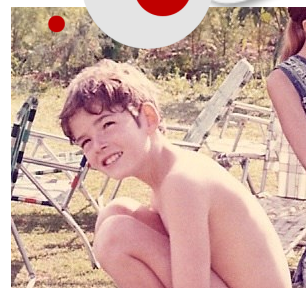
Given my mathematics and active participation in class, I was streamed into class where my weak reading and writing skills were highlighted and was hauled up so often for not concentrating whether it was spelling, comprehension or compositions. However,

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the class teacher, Mr Williamson, who was also my math teacher, thought something was 'wrong'. Instead of expressing exasperation, he helped with my reading by making me read out aloud after lunch each day and encouraging my English teacher to be more patient and not to highlight my struggles in front of the class.



I will always be grateful to Mr Williamson for helping and protecting me. He never sought any thanks but did express a certain quiet pride when I passed my 'common entrance' exams, equivalent to the PSLEs, with good marks and moved onto my secondary school, Rugby.

At Rugby, I was fortunate that my two best friends both realised early on that we had to study hard to get through school. We understood that fighting the system wouldn't get us anywhere.

None of us liked the homework but realised that avoiding or doing it badly didn't get us anywhere. We developed our own way to 'study smart'; focus on the task assigned and avoid having to do any of it again the next day or, worse, in detention. We pushed each other to complete the homework so that we could move onto our own discussions on music, cars and the normal daydreams that teenagers enjoy. We've remained friends even through each of us live on different continents.

WORK

Though school and university, I chose subjects that reduced my requirement to write. I read and studied carefully the required reading's but rarely would I read any optional texts. I just did not have the time. My principle was quality over quantity. I focused on the subject's fundamental principles and concepts and worked out how to derive answers from these principles.

As I started my professional career, I never accepted that dyslexia would hold me back. I knew that just as I had to 'study smart', I would now need to 'work smart'. In line with my school and university experiences, I continued to work hard but understood that to succeed, I needed to manage down my workload. My measure of success was not how many hours that I worked but rather the quality of my output. It was better to think through the issue, develop a plan before tackling the work assignment.

When it came to starting my career, I still sought a profession that would reduce my requirements to write reports or draft documents. A natural choice was Accounting. In order, to acquire the key accounting principles and concepts, I decided that it would be best to qualify as a Chartered Accountant even if this meant that I would have to study in the evenings. I would need to 'work smart' and then 'study smart'. I qualified with first time passes and successfully moved on from the audit profession into a commercial accounting role.

As I progressed through my career, I could no longer avoid the requirement to write reports. However, two factors helped my writing. The most important was computerisation and the spelling (and later grammar) checking functions that were now built into most programs. In addition, I now had the confidence and experience to simplify the report structure, write in bullet points and focus on my insights whilst eliminating unnecessary descriptions. My supervisors and directors appreciated the short "to-the-point" commentaries.

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When I moved over to become the Group Finance Director for an Asian focused multinational, the expectations of the Chairman and the other board members were high. My predecessor wrote descriptive reports to support the monthly management accounts, though they tend to veer off and cover other observations he'd made during his country visits.

Given the subject, accounting and finance, my vocabulary did not need to be extensive but good sentence structure and grammar was critical. I also had to show that I wasn't my predecessor. I would provide good insights but remain factual.

At first, in my initial enthusiasm, I dropped my normal rule of waiting at least one day before proofreading my reports. My board colleagues kept on picking up 'daft' errors. These included missing or additional words, similar sounding words, wrong tenses and wrong spelling of names. After a few months, a colleague aggressively asked if I had dyslexia and if I had, I should have disclosed this in my interviews. I was completely taken aback by this tone but managed to reply that I had naturally highlighted my strengths, key skills & experiences. I personally saw that my dyslexia strengthened my ability to see changes in trends and thus provide a stronger understanding of the Group's financial performance.

After further discussion, he agreed that as I was providing insights that he would never have spotted even after over 50 years of experience in the Group. Importantly, we agreed that I should not feel rushed to get out reports and that an extra day to proofread was not an issue.

As I further settled into this role, I built a very strong team. We worked together to utilise our strengths. I would often ask a team member to proofread my reports before distribution (and I would edit their reports to remove complex sentence structures).



VOLUNTEERING

After a successful and rewarding career, I felt that it was time to step back from my profession and then step forward to help others. Given my experiences, I was drawn to education and, in particular, wanted to support children with learning differences. I started on the Specialist Diploma in Learning Support for Specific Learning Differences (SpLD) run by DAS Academy. However, despite the high quality of teaching, I had to conclude that my skill gap, especially in phonemic awareness and phonics, was too wide and I was not going to be able to complete the teaching practicum and thus demonstrate my ability to support a struggling learner.

However, despite or in spite of this setback, I still wanted to help the Dyslexia Association of Singapore (DAS). The more I looked into the management of DAS, the more impressed I was by the leadership and dedication of all the teachers, managers and staff. I've pushed myself into the Audit and Risk committee which I have found an excellent position to learn more about how DAS works, especially its relationship with MOE and other government bodies, whilst utilising the skills and experiences gained during my accounting and finance career.

Dyslexia Association of Singapore is a truly remarkable organisation.

