

Note: This is a writing prompt that I completed for a neurodiversity scholarship application. I hope this may make you feel less alone with your own disability journey. If you ever need to talk with someone, you can email me at jacquelyn@mindslikemine.com.

Prompt: What has your journey been to get to where you are today?

I was diagnosed with dyslexia at age nine and dyscalculia at age fourteen. My school experience from first grade to twelfth grade was quite difficult and even traumatic at times. It is unfortunate that a common experience in the learning disability community is that schools do not believe the validity of an individual's disability and support needs. This happened to me my whole life. I would hear statements in my IEP meetings such as “due to her good grades, we do not believe Jacquelyn needs x,y,z.” I would express, in-depth, my challenges at school and the IEP team would disregard them. The team members could not fathom that a student, like myself, could both be struggling in school and have A's on the report card. Then, the hardest thing I have ever experienced happened: I was found ineligible for an IEP my sophomore year.

I had an IEP implemented in third grade. After private neuropsychological testing, I was diagnosed with dyslexia. My IEP continued through freshman year of high school. It was my safety net and losing it made me feel angry and lost. It was mind-boggling to think that a special education team dedicated to protecting students with disabilities and ensuring their right to a free and appropriate public education could then turn around and deny the very support they were meant to provide. Thankfully, my parents were huge advocates for me and helped me throughout the entire process. After legal intervention my IEP was reinstated. However, not everyone has the privilege of a supportive, stable family or the financial resources to access the help they need outside of school. I have always felt a deep empathy for people with stories like that.

While navigating the challenges of a broken education system is a significant part of my story, another key part is how I built an online community of individuals with learning disabilities. In 2020, after my dyscalculia diagnosis, I felt extremely overwhelmed because I did not know how I would manage life with two learning disabilities. I made an introductory video on TikTok (@Jacquelyn_Elyse) explaining my disabilities and how I hope to share the good, the bad, and aim to build a community where people can relate to one another. Since 2020, my TikTok has gained over 6,200 followers.

My audience started off as teens, but now includes people of all ages. In fact, I have received numerous comments from people of an older generation explaining that they likely have dyslexia or dyscalculia. However, many of them a) never knew the

disability existed or b) it was very stigmatized and he or she was unable to receive the proper help as a child. Knowing I am making a difference, whether in a small or significant way, makes me so happy to do what I do. One message that gave me a new perspective of my advocacy was when a mother told me that because of one of my videos, her daughter was diagnosed with dyscalculia. Her daughter will now start high school with the appropriate support in place. This is why I love social media! I can reach a broader audience and make an impact on people's lives for the better.

Additional key accomplishments that I am proud of include being featured on a PBS show (*A World of Difference*), writing an article for *Dystinct Magazine*, and not only being interviewed by *Education Week*, but also serving as a guest speaker for one of their panel discussions. As stated above, the reach that social media has is truly astonishing. I am so grateful for these opportunities to continue sharing my disability journey and advocating for my community. I am also proud of creating my very own website called mindslikemine.com. I hope to further connect with my audience on my website through surveys and email submissions. It is important to hear multiple perspectives of peoples' disability journeys, not just mine.

My greatest passion is advocating for the learning disability community and I hope to continue to do that for a very long time through social media, and hopefully one day, through in-person events.

This was written by Jacquelyn Taylor and is from the website mindslikemine.com.