

A Child's View

Visual Perceptual Disabilities

Even though our eye sight is usually normal, some of us get the messages that are sent from our eyes to our brains mixed up. That doesn't necessarily mean we need glasses. It means that we have difficulty interpreting what we see – we see things differently than other people see them. When our eyes play tricks on us like this, we have a type of learning problem called *visual perceptual disability*.

Following are some examples of what it is like to have a visual perceptual disability:-

Sometimes we mix up letters that look alike. Instead of seeing 'b' we see a 'd', 'g', 'p' or 'q'. When we are reading we can't automatically see which letter it is.

We might read 'god' or 'pop' instead of 'dog',

'peg' or 'bed', instead of 'beg';

or put 'put' or 'gut' instead of 'but'.

Other letters that might confuse us are:

'm' and 'n' or 'n' and 'h'.

So we see 'mose' instead of 'nose' or 'hot' instead of 'not'.



A story can be pretty confusing when you cannot read some of the most important words! And it is pretty embarrassing when you read out loud and everybody hears you making one mistake after another. That's why we hate to read out loud unless we know for sure that we know all the words.

Letters aren't the only things that confuse us. Shapes sometimes look alike too. We might not see the difference between a square and a rectangle.

We may also mix up numbers because they look alike to us.

'6' and '9', '3' and '8', '2' and '5' and '4' and '9' are real toughies! Lots of numbers together are especially difficult, like 9496273. It looks harmless, but can really throw you when you have a learning disability.

We may even confuse letters and numbers.

'E' may look like '3' or '5' might look like 's'.

Sometimes we see whole words or letters and numbers upside down. For example:

'on' seems like 'no',

'was' might appear as 'saw',

'sung' seems like 'snug',

or '720 becomes '270' or '072' or '702' or '207'.

We might see all the letters of a word but see them all in the wrong order:

'spot' is seen as 'pots'

'lisp' comes out 'lips' or 'slip'.

That would certainly change the meaning of a sentence! It could come out: 'When he fell, he cut his slip!'

Or we get the words in a sentence mixed up.

Instead of 'He lived in the house under the hill', we might read: 'He lived under the house in the hill.'

It sounds funny, but it's not funny when you are taking a test that is important to your grade!

Sometimes we might also have trouble with focusing and teaming our eyes, so the letters and words might go blurry or look as if they are moving or the words might seem to run into each other, like this:

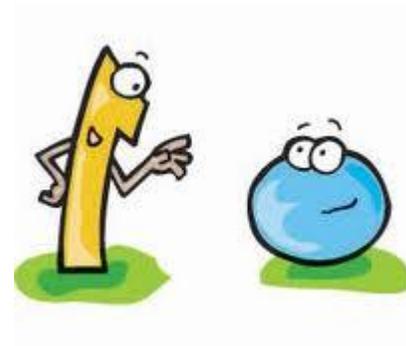
SOMETIMESALLTHELETTERSINTHEWORDSAREJUMBLESTOGETHERLIKETHIS

Fortunately, reading glasses are often an easy solution for these problems, and often we will outgrow the need for them as we get older.

Sometimes we have eye-tracking problems as well, so the words might do a crazy dance like this:

W R E M O D C E L O E H L E
O S T N A V T A
DS E A L R E P C

When words seem all mixed up like this, we often skip words or whole sentences, or we read them twice.



Math book pages can be confusing too. The math book page seems like a jumble of confusing numbers spread all over the page. Sometimes it's hard to tell where a problem begins and where it ends.

Sometimes we make mistakes because we can't tell if we are supposed to add, subtract, multiply or divide because the symbols (+ - x ÷) look the same to us.

We may also have trouble telling time because the hands on the clock look the same length to us. Counting money is hard when you can't tell the difference between the coins.

Visual perceptual problem's make it hard to read, write, copy and to do math. But they also make it hard to do other things like:

- Buttoning buttons
- Tying shoelaces
- Cutting with scissors
- Coloring within the lines
- Reading a map
- Reading music



"That's the last time I ask you to tie my shoe laces!"

So visual perceptual problems can have a big impact on our lives!

And very often when we have visual perceptual problems we have other problems as well....

Auditory Disabilities

In much the same way as some people with normal sight have visual perceptual problems, some people with normal hearing have auditory perceptual problems.

This means we have trouble hearing different sounds in words. We have a lot of trouble blending sounds together to make up new words and breaking words up into smaller sounds, so reading and spelling is hard for us.

Very often we will have a lot of trouble hearing things when there is noise in the background, so it can be hard to understand what the teacher is saying in the classroom.

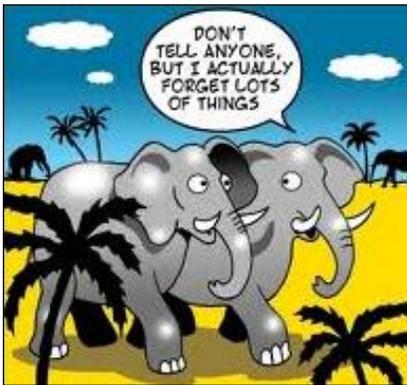
And VERY often we will have trouble remembering what we heard...

Memory Disabilities

To us the big mystery about memory disabilities is why we can remember some things as if they just happened, but not other things. It seems that we can always remember when we failed a test or did something wrong, but we forget good things or the things we are supposed to remember! Sometimes we forget something just 2 seconds later!

Some days we remember things very well - but the next day we don't remember them at all! It's frustrating when we don't know whether we'll remember something on another day or not - especially if we're being tested on it!

When we were little, some of us had trouble learning the alphabet and identifying the letters, remembering how to count or the names of numbers, colours, shapes, animals, or common objects. Even when we are older, we still may forget people's names, our address or our phone number!



Memory problems affect reading - remembering the sounds of letters, sight words, or what's just been read.

Nearly all of us have trouble with spelling. We may know the sounds that make up a word, but we can't remember the letters or the order in which they come.

So we spell "wrds xakie az tha snd to us!" We might add extra letters when we spell, or we leave out the letters we don't hear. We might

spell 'girl' as 'grl'; 'wire' as 'yer'; 'house' as 'howc'; 'because' as 'becz'; 'assigned' as 'asind'; 'use' as 'youz'; 'really' as 'rille', etc, etc.

In math, we may understand how to do the problems but are not able to remember the steps we have to use to get the answer. Or, we remember how to do only part of the problem - we might be able to add and multiply, but are unable to subtract or divide.

Timed tests in math are particularly difficult for us. Not only do we have to remember the math facts, but we must be able to write them legibly 'under pressure' within time limits. That's torture!

Those of us with memory problems know it is important to write everything down. The problem is we don't remember the teacher's directions or the homework assignments long enough to be able to write them!

Once we're home doing homework, we find that we forgot how to do something we were able to do at school.

Motor Disabilities

Motor disabilities can involve the big muscles in our body (gross motor disability) and/or the small muscles (fine motor disability). Kids with gross motor problems may seem to be clumsy, bump into things, or have difficulties with gym or sport activities.

Kids with fine motor problems may have problems tying their shoe laces, colouring within the lines, using scissors, or have trouble writing.

And lots of us have difficulty with motor planning and getting the two sides of our bodies working together.

Writing Disabilities

It seems many, many kids with learning disabilities - and most of us - have difficulties with writing. As a result, we try everything in the book to avoid writing! Or we write as little as possible.



For example, when the teacher asks us to write a story about Captain Cook, the story we hand in may have only four sentences even though we could tell her a whole book's worth about the man. Usually the four sentences get us a lousy mark, which is frustrating because we do know the whole story of Captain Cook.

Why is writing so hard for us? Good question! Writing involves many things that we have to do all at the same time. We have to know what we want to write, figure out what words to use, spell the words correctly, use correct grammar and punctuation, hold the pen or pencil correctly so that our fingers don't ache after a while, be creative, be organized, and not take forever to get the assignment done. On top of all that, we have to be neat!

When kids with learning disabilities write, they might have problems remembering how the letters are made and in which direction they go.

Capital letters are sometimes easier to remember. So we might write a capital letter in the middle of a word.

Copying words or numbers from another piece of paper, a book, or from the blackboard is extremely difficult for many of us, especially those of us who have visual perceptual problem in addition to motor disabilities,

Sometimes we can do a math problem in our head, but when we have to write it down, we can't!

Writing is frustrating for us because we usually like making up stories and stuff, but our minds think faster than our hands can write. By the time we are able to write what we want to say, we forget what we wanted to say!