

VISUAL PERCEPTUAL SKILLS: STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

Visual perception related to writing difficulties overlaps with many other psychological processes, including attention, memory (recognition or recall of previously retained information), sensory integration (functioning of two or more sensory systems simultaneously), problem solving, concept formation (ability to respond in a specific way to a class of stimuli), and simultaneous processing. Because of this, there are many reasons why a child might have difficulty processing visual information, including ocular motor dysfunction, weakness in any of the above areas, as well as weak ability to process visual information specifically. Strategies can be devised to make learning easier despite weak visual perceptual skills.

Compensatory strategies focus on alternate ways to recall how letters, numbers, or words look. This could include placement of a strip with letters and numbers on it on a child's desk for use during writing; verbal strategies for remembering the correct form; or writing with eyes averted or closed if visual information confuses the child. When weakness in any visual perceptual process causes great difficulty in the classroom, it is appropriate to use bypassing techniques that eliminate or decrease visual perceptual demands. Use of a word processor, verbal demonstration of knowledge, or decreased writing requirements can help to keep the focus where it should be - on the content, organization, and rules of writing, rather than on the act of producing letters and words and orienting them correctly on the page.

- *Keep the child's visual field as simple as possible.* Minimize distracting elements whenever the child is working on a visual or visual-motor task.
- *Use visual and tactile cues.* Emphasize and direct attention to important visual aspects of tasks. Use colored marker to darken outlines for activities with line boundaries, such as coloring, maze, or scissor-cutting activities. Paper that adds color and tactile cues is helpful.
- *Adapt activities.* Show only the object that requires visual attention. Prepare worksheets with only one problem, work item, or sentence per page. For writing, place construction paper under the line being written, read, or revised; teach child to move the paper down as lines are completed.

- *Consider all sensory modalities when presenting material.* Emphasize movement and touch. Use plastic tactile alphabet, writing in damp sand with a finger, writing words in paint, writing with crayon on paper over a textured surface. Lots of repetition of motor patterns for letters, with eyes closed, is often helpful.
- Students who are demonstrating increased difficulty with letter formation - *Reinforce letter learning auditorily and with vision occluded.* Describe how letters are formed.
- *Use word processor with spell-checker.* It eliminates the need for fine spatial discrimination involved in letter formation.
- *Try variety of papers.* Graph paper helps with spacing of letters or math problems. Raised line decreases visual demands and helps children to feel boundaries. Visual cues such as placing a star in the upper left-hand corner of the page will indicate where writing starts.

Reference:

Levine-Johnson, Kristin (1991). Fine motor dysfunction therapeutic strategies in the classroom. Therapy Skill Builders: Tucson AZ.