

Overview - visual stress

Visual stress (also called Meares-Irlen Syndrome or Scotopic Sensitivity) refers to reading difficulties, light sensitivity and headaches from exposure to disturbing visual patterns. It can cause visual discomfort when reading, especially for long periods of time. This discomfort may include blurring and fading of print, movement of letters, appearance of patterns in text, and page glare. Some students find that using a coloured overlay or tinted glasses can reduce these symptoms.

Students with visual stress may have difficulty with:

- Reading quickly and accurately.
- Taking in the meaning of what they read.
- Extreme fatigue after a few minutes of reading.
- Reading out loud.
- Losing their place on the page/screen.
- Copying from the whiteboard/projector.
- Reading a computer screen.
- Sore eyes and headaches.

(These problems often mean a student will avoid reading whenever possible.)



Top tips for teaching students with visual stress:

- Ideally, provide handouts in electronic format so that students can customise the way they look.
- Use a plain, evenly-spaced sans serif font, such as Arial, Verdana or Tahoma.
- Use a font size of at least 12 points on handouts or 28 points on slides.
- Use dark text on a light (not white) background.
- Avoid underlining and *italics* – use **bold** instead as it is clearer.
- Avoid TEXT IN BLOCK CAPITALS, which is harder to read.
- Use justified left margin with ragged right edge to help the student keep their place.
- Use plenty of white space and line spacing of at least 1.5 points.
- Limit the information on pages/slides.
- Avoid text over diagrams or patterned backgrounds.
- Be aware of 'jarring' colour combinations, such as red and green.
- Be open to students using coloured overlays or reading rulers.
- Be aware that students with visual stress will take longer to read.

Useful links

- <http://www.opticalm.ca/Simulations-of-symptoms.html>
(simulations)
- <http://www.crossboweducation.com/articles/visual-stress-symptoms-and-solutions/sadfasdf>
- <http://www.ceriumoptical.com/vistech/faqs.aspx>
- <http://bdatech.org/what-technology/typefaces-for-dyslexia/>

