



Visual Perceptual Skills – Figure-Ground

Definition of visual figure-ground and its importance:

Visual figure-ground distinction is the ability to maintain visual attention on an object whilst other stimuli form the background (i.e. finding an object amongst many). Figure ground is important for attending to tasks / instructions, finding objects (e.g. items in drawers). It is a skill that is needed when scanning. A child who cannot distinguish figure from background usually finds it difficult to concentrate on one thing only. Surrounding noises and activity easily distracts them. At school they may appear inattentive. Work may be messy e.g. when asked to rule a line, the line seldom stops where it should but continues on up the side of the book. e.g. selecting a blue pencil among many or focusing on a particular word among others.

Strategies and activities to develop visual sequential memory

Depending on your child's abilities and interests, please choose appropriate activities from the list below.

Primary School Age:

- Use reading markers – square cut out in the middle of a card
- When looking for an object in a bag or cupboard, teach how to visualise that object or look for distinguishing features e.g. a DVD is rectangular and flat
- Crosswords/quiz words and Sudoku
- Colouring by numbers
- Bingo and other board games
- Making/copying patterns
- Word/letter/number/symbol search on a busy page
- Scanning tracking activities – circling the same word in a text
- Odd one out pictures
- Overlapping figures – trace the outline of a particular shape
- Find a fairly detailed picture and ask the child to find specific objects in that picture e.g. an underwater picture – ask the child to find all the blue fish or all the striped fish

Secondary School Age:

- Use a ruler to keep place when reading
- In the classroom avoid unnecessary clutter
- Make hand-outs simple, clear, precise and avoid unnecessary detail or pictures
- Highlight key points and information so the student can home in on it more easily
- Where possible, colour code charts and graphs
- When looking for an object in a bag or cupboard, teach student how to visualise that object or look for distinguishing features e.g. a DVD is rectangular and flat



- Consider seating plan carefully to reduce distractions as much as possible
- Jigsaws of increasing complexity
- Crosswords/quiz words and Sudoku
- Colouring by numbers
- Board games
- Making/copying patterns
- Word/letter/number/symbol search on a busy page
- Scanning tracking activities – circling the same word in a text
- Odd one out picture cards
- Use reading markers – square cut out in the middle of a card
- Discriminating objects in a room e.g. find all the red objects, the square objects or all the wooden objects
- Find a fairly detailed picture and ask the child to find specific objects in that picture
- Write alphabet or words inside the squares on graph paper.

More ways to help accommodate visual perceptual skill difficulties:

- If possible, allow extra time to process visual information
- Narrate visual presentations aloud
- Keep the area around the individual clear of distractions and clutter
- Encourage comfortable, supported sitting (e.g. feet on the floor and elbows resting on the table at a 90-degree angle) or straight standing at a vertical surface.