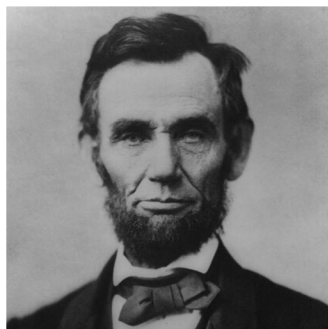




**bite** find



nose *plan*

Purpose: This exercise helps someone who does not have a vision impairment gain some degree of experiential knowledge of how a person reads and sees objects when the person has a large, central blank spot (scotoma) in the center of the retina (in conditions such as advanced macular degeneration).

Instructions: If you use eyeglasses for reading, put them on. Hold the paper at approximately 14—16 inches away from your face. Look straight at any one of the hands at the top of the reading card.

Without looking away from the hand, try to read the large words below the hands. (When you try this, if you cannot clearly see the five fingers of the hand and the dots around the circle, then you are probably looking straight at the word you are trying to read, rather than the hand. For someone who has central vision, it takes a lot of concentration to look straight at the hand, while trying to read the word. Your eye muscles almost automatically bring what you are trying to identify to the center of the retina.) When you do this exercise correctly, the large word on the left of the card still may be difficult to read, even though the print is large, bold, and the letters are spaced apart from one another. (This is one reason that, even when print is enlarged, people with low vision may be reading much more slowly and with more effort than people with average visual abilities, and may use audio and/or tactile methods of access for lengthier reading tasks.) The large word on the right side of the card may be even more difficult (perhaps impossible) to read than the large word on the left because it is printed in an italicized font with condensed horizontal spacing, and is poorer contrast. You may notice also that if you stare straight at one of the hands while trying fixedly to read one of the words, the word may seem to fade with time. If you look at one of the other hands, you may notice that the word becomes somewhat more distinct when you first look at another hand. Nerve cells on the retina activate as visual input changes, and this can make the word temporarily more distinct. Although you may be able to detect their presence, the smaller words on the page will be impossible to read when you look straight at a hand unless they can be enlarged in some way. The area of retinal tissue that the words are falling on when you are looking at one of the hands does not have as many nerve cells as densely packed together as the center area of the retina, making very small details impossible to identify. Notice the difference in your ability to see Abraham Lincoln's face when you look straight at the face, as compared to when you look straight at one of the hands while trying to see his face.

Other awareness exercises:

1. Look at your face in a mirror. You can get as close to the mirror as you want. Try to see your eye when you are looking straight at: a) your eyebrow, b) the tip of your nose, c) your mouth. As you look straight at features that are farther from your eye, you may notice that the details of your eye will become less distinct. This is because the image of the eye is falling on an area of the retina that is progressively further away from the center of the retina. Now, try to figure out what your face looks like while looking straight at one of your ears.
2. Watch TV looking straight at the edges of your TV screen. Or draw stars on 5 or 6 small Post-It squares and post them randomly on the TV screen. Fixate only on these stars as you watch TV, switching from star-to-star to move your gaze closest to what you want to see.
3. You can simulate reading print on a computer using the same strategy described in #2 above. The Post-It notes need to be cut smaller: Using the sticky part of the Post-It note, cut out about 3 or 4 dots that are about the size of a thumb-print and draw a small star in the center. Then cut out about 3 or 4 that are about the diameter of a pencil eraser, and draw a star on each of these. Stick the dots randomly on a PC monitor display. Again, as in #2, you must fixate your gaze on the stars, but can move from star-to-star to help you get closer to what you are trying to see. With a computer, you can also move the print that you are trying to read closer to the dot that you are fixating on to increase the distinctness of the print. You can also make the print larger by using pressing CTRL and turning the scroll wheel, or pressing CTRL and the "+" keys together. Getting closer to your PC monitor will also make the print appear larger. You will probably notice visual fatigue as you are doing this exercise. The fatigue is the reason that people with low vision who are using computers often use text-to-speech programs so they can listen to lengthier passages of text.
4. Place an empty coffee mug near your dinner plate. Eat dinner while looking straight at the coffee mug.
5. Walk around a room looking straight at the walls or ceiling of the room you are in. (Caution: Do this exercise with care. You are at greater risk for injury when you are not looking straight at potential obstacles and other objects, especially since you are "newly" visually impaired!)

(L Burkhardt, 01/2010)