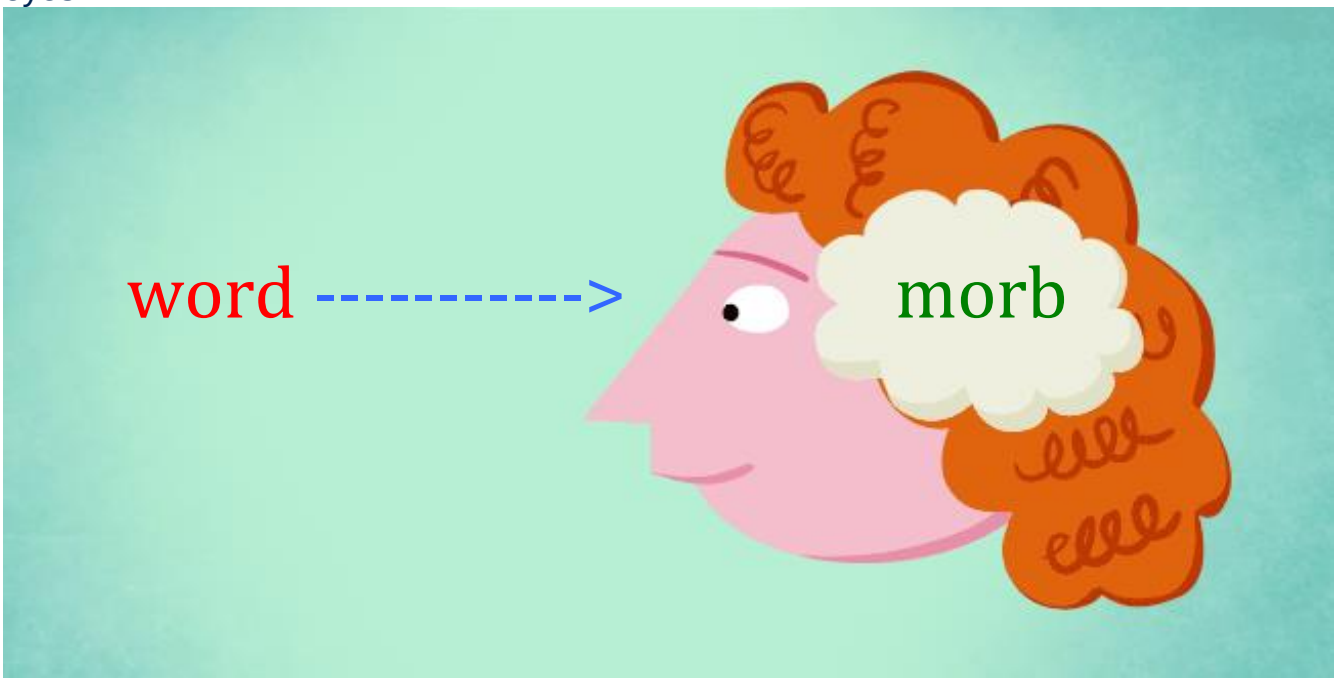
Visual Processing Dyslexia

Visual dyslexia is not a physical problem with the eyes but a neurological difficulty with the brain.
It is important to get your eyes tested to make sure these problems aren't being caused by them.

What is it?

This type of dyslexia is a reduced ability to make sense of information taken in through the eyes.



When someone with dyslexia is reading or spelling they have to hold a sequence of symbols in their head and process them into writing. Something in this process can go wrong.

What are the difficulties?

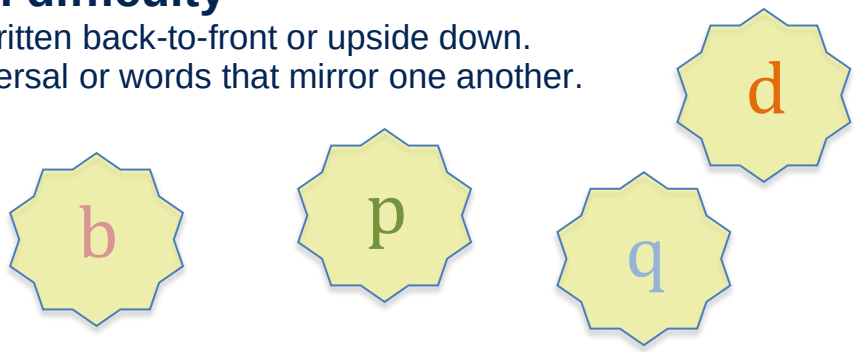
Slower reading speed

The brain is less efficient at recognising letter symbols, matching them to sounds and outputting the answer.
This causes slower, hesitant reading with many small mistakes.



Visual discrimination difficulty

Letters and numbers can be written back-to-front or upside down. Especially those that are a reversal or words that mirror one another.
‘b’ and ‘d’.
‘P’ and ‘9’
‘was’ and ‘saw’.
‘does’ and ‘dose’



Left-right confusion.

Difficulty with the orientation of letters can extend to directional confusion between left and right.

Mixing up the sequence of letters

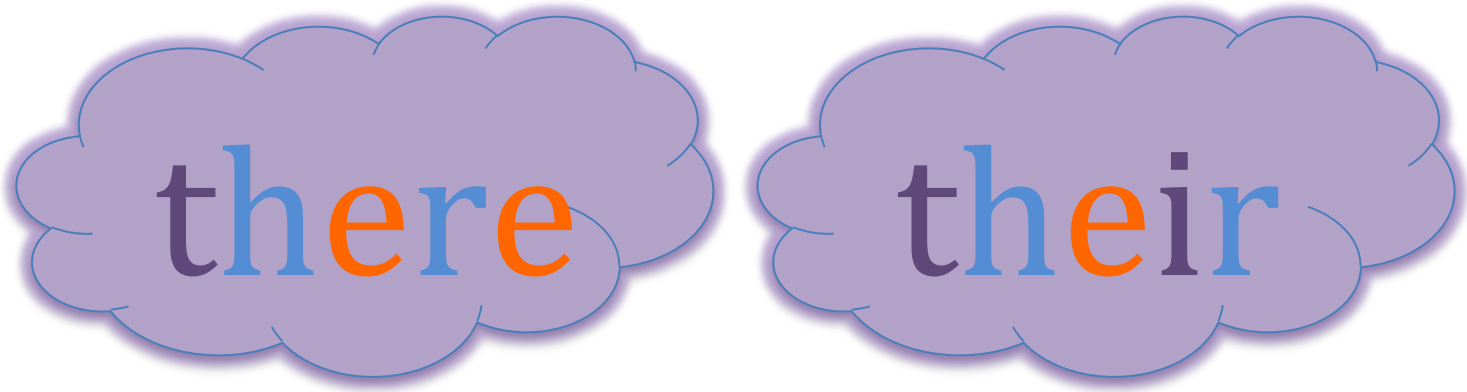
This is most often seen in spelling. The child may know how to spell the word but the information is output from the brain in the wrong sequence. Typical errors are ‘dose’ for ‘does’, ‘hlep’ for ‘help’. Omitting letters when spelling is also common.

Visual recall – not recognising the same word

Visual memory allows us to recognise and remember letters, numbers, symbols, and words. Where there is a problem with accessing this visual memory a child won’t remember words they read just a few moments before. It may also cause a word that is learned one day to be forgotten the next.

Struggling to spell homophones and sight words

Homophones are words that sound the same but are spelled differently. e.g. ‘their’ and ‘there’, ‘pane’ and ‘pain’. Sight words don’t follow phonic rules so they have to be learned by remembering the way they look e.g. spelling ‘does’ as it sounds ‘duz’. Homophones and sight words are particularly problematic as many children with visual processing dyslexia who often rely upon sounding out the word to spell it because they cannot remember the way it looks.



Difficulty copying

This task is very difficult for a child with visual dyslexia. Copying will be much slower because only a small portion can be remembered at a time. Even glancing away can cause some of the words to be forgotten. The copied text is often inaccurate or incomplete.

Visual pursuit and tracking

When reading, if the child misses off the end of a word, skips over a word or misses out lines this is the ability to visually track along a line of text. When reading aloud it will cause hesitancy and many errors. 8. **Slower written output**. Don't expect as much written work to be produced. There will be lots of ideas but putting those thoughts into words will be a much longer to process.



5 Helpful Strategies for Visual Processing Dyslexia

When teaching a student with visual processing difficulties place an emphasis upon auditory channels (unless this is also weak then it will have to be kinesthetic).

1. Use a structured phonic approach

Understanding spelling rules will help. Gain mastery of all the phonic sounds, syllables, prefixes and suffixes so a child knows how to construct a word using sounds.

2. Mnemonic spelling strategies can be used to help spell sight words

The first letter of each word spells out the word you need to remember. A funny picture reinforces the memory. e.g. was a sausage helps to spell ‘was’.

3. Use the ability to rhyme as a spelling strategy

Rhyming can be used to help to by recognise common letter patterns, e.g. if you know how to spell pink then it will help ‘drink’, ‘stink’ and ‘think’.

4. Copying must be kept to a minimum

It is better for the teacher to attach a print out of homework in a student’s planner than to expect them to record it. If possible, add the phone number of a friend they can call if they forget what has been set for homework.



5.Try different colours behind text

A white background can cause visual stress. The ‘glare’ causes words to blur or even move on the page. White light is made up of several colours, each with its own frequency. Some of these frequencies can confuse the brain. Use coloured backgrounds or lay coloured acetate over a white page to eliminate the colour frequency that is causing the problem. Daily eye exercises like those developed by Anne Arbour are likely to improve visual tracking accuracy and reduce reading errors.

To reduce reading errors use a reading ruler or card with a section cut out that only reveals a few words at a time. When paired reading use a finger or pencil to follow under the words and keep the eyes focused upon the right place.