

What is Irlen Syndrome?

Irlen Syndrome is a perceptual processing difficulty.

A perceptual processing difficulty is when the brain has a problem making sense of information taken in through the eyes. This is different from problems involving sight or vision. Perceptual processing difficulties affect how visual information is interpreted by the brain.

Irlen Syndrome is hereditary and runs in families, affecting males and females equally.

However, an individual can acquire Irlen Syndrome as a result of illness, medical procedures, or head injury.

Like Autism, Irlen Syndrome is a spectrum disorder, falling on a continuum from slight to severe. Individuals who can read or perform visually intensive activities for 40-60 minutes before any Irlen Symptoms appear are on the slight end of the spectrum. These individuals can manage most academic tasks without difficulty

But when endurance is required their performance may deteriorate.

Individuals with severe Irlen Syndrome will experience symptoms within 20 minutes of beginning to read. For some, symptoms may not begin immediately; however, symptoms will get worse the longer the student continues to read.

Irlen Syndrome symptoms can be removed by the use of coloured overlays or coloured lenses.

There are a variety of different symptoms that students with Irlen Syndrome experience. The most common are:



Light Sensitivity



Reading problems



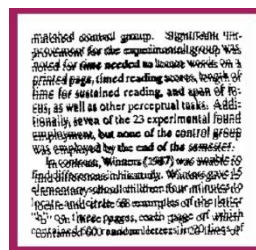
Attention and concentration problems



Strain & fatigue



Problems with depth perception



Print or environmental distortions



Headaches & Migraines

Irlen Syndrome is not identified by current educational, medical, optometric, or psychological tests, so educators and parents need to be informed and aware of the signs, symptoms, and available solutions. The Irlen method, which utilises coloured overlays and tinted lenses to address Irlen Syndrome, does not replace the need for reading instruction and remediation, but is one piece of the puzzle that can help struggling readers.

How can you Identify Students at Risk?

A simple self-test can be administered to individuals or groups of students. Any students answering "yes" to 3 or more questions in the table below may be at risk for Irlen Syndrome and should have a formal screening by a certified Irlen Screener.

	YES	NO
Do you skip words or lines when reading?		
Do you reread lines?		
Do you lose your place when reading?		
Are you easily distracted when reading?		
Do you need to take breaks often?		
Do you find it harder to read the longer you read?		
Do you get headaches when you read?		
Do your eyes get red and watery while reading?		
Does reading make you tired?		
Do you blink or squint?		
Do you prefer to read in dim light?		
Do you read close to the page?		
Do you use your finger or other markers to read?		
Do you get restless, active, or fidgety when reading?		

Three or more "yes" answers suggest a student should be screened for Irlen Syndrome. You can find an Irlen screener by contacting Empowered Learning Trust at empoweredlearning@xtra.co.nz or visiting, www.irlen.com

What are the Solutions?

For individuals with Irlen Syndrome, using either Coloured Overlays (placed over paper), or Spectral filters (worn as glasses), filter out the specific wavelengths of light that create stress on the brain. This leads to significant improvement in physical comfort and print clarity.

Coloured overlays are a low-cost, non-invasive intervention that is easy to implement and can be highly effective specifically for reading.



Coloured overlays are a wonderful tool, and work well for many students who have Irlen Syndrome. However, for many students experiencing physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, issues with depth perception, anxiety or fidgeting, coloured lenses worn as glasses will provide a more optimal solution.

Professionals trained in the Irlen method are able to determine the specific colour required for each individual's brain.

You can help:

- Encourage children to wear their lenses
- reduce fluorescent lighting
- ask teachers to reduce copying from a whiteboard.
- change the background colour on computer screens, and overhead projectors
- wearing a brimmed hat can help with glare
- use off-white, non-glossy paper for copying



If you would like more information regarding Irlen Syndrome, coloured lenses, coloured overlays, or would like an Irlen screening, please contact our staff at Empowered Learning Trust: email: empoweredlearning@xtra.co.nz