

FAQs RE COLOURED OVERLAYS

By Dr. Teeya Scholten, C. Psych.
1-403-230-2959

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Q#1: Why are you encouraging everyone to see if coloured overlays help their reading?

A: I believe that every school should have their own set of coloured overlays to be able to screen EVERY reader - not just those reporting challenges with reading. I feel that it is important to routinely rule out any visual challenges that someone may experience because they can be a subtle but serious source of stress. The good news is that this is a source of stress that can be easily treated. Finding ways to reduce stress in our lives can contribute greatly to the process of learning how to be the best we can be as naturally as possible.

Q#2: How can I tell if coloured overlays will help me or my child read better?

A: Find a book with black letters on white pages that can be easily read. Put each of the colours over the text and see if any colours make it look clearer or easier to read for any reason. Divide the coloured overlays into piles – i) makes it easier to read ii) makes no difference and iii) makes it harder to read.

Take the coloured overlays in the “easier to read” pile and test them to see which one is the best. Begin to read out loud without using any colour at first. Then, every four or five lines put a coloured overlay over the text. Listen to what the reader says about which colour feels the best. It is a good idea to have someone else listening for optimal speed, accuracy and smoothness in the reading.

Q#3: What colours are usually used to test for this?

A: Traditionally, there are 8 basic colours. These are: Blue Aquamarine (OAQ04), Turquoise (OTQ04), Peach (OPH04), Pale Rose (OPR04), Pink (OPK04), Gray (OGR04) and Yellow (OYL04). However, many other colours have been developed and these are often tested as well. In the packages of 12 colours that I have put together, the added colours include: Gold (OGO04), True Red (OTR04), Dark Green (OGD04) and Purple (OPU04). The National Reading Styles Inventory sells a total of 16 colours.

Q#4: Why do I read better with a particular coloured overlay?

A: That is a very good question. There could be any combination of a number of reasons including (but not limited to): Contrast sensitivity, sensitivity to fluorescent lighting, stress, eye co-ordination problems, difficulty with

accommodation and other visual processing problems (see www.optometrists.org for more info on visual problems) or the Irlen Syndrome (also known as Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome – see www.irlen.com).

Q#5: What should I do if I find that I read better when I use a coloured overlay?

A: This is a controversial area and different practitioners would have different recommendations. When this happens to my clients, I usually recommend a 3-step approach. This seems to work quite effectively.

STEP ONE:

Once you have selected a colour that seems to be best, begin by reading for 10 minutes per day for three weeks. See if the overlay continues to be helpful. At the end of this 3-week period, many people find that they no longer need to use the overlay. No one yet knows the reason for these results. Perhaps the reading practice has resulted in an improvement in visual tracking. Perhaps having the text clearer has reduced the stress one feels while reading and the individual has become more relaxed. However, this is only speculation at this point and points out the need for scientific research in this field.

STEP TWO:

If the overlay still helps after 3 weeks, there are several options available to you.

- a) You may wish to continue using the overlay with all of your reading. You may also find it helpful to xerox any reading material onto the colour that is most helpful. Some people find it easier to write on pages of that particular colour and to select this colour as the background colour on their computer monitor (On PC's, select Format and then choose the desired colour from Background).
- b) I usually recommend that my clients seek a visual evaluation from a Developmental Optometrist at this point. These are optometrists with specialized training. They know how to do regular check-ups such as assessing the health of the eye and acuity (i.e., how sharply you see up close and in the distance). However, they have a unique ability to check eye-coordination (i.e., how well your eyes work together) and other functions important to the reading process. This last area is something that regular Optometrists do not check.

At this point, if there is something going on with visual processing, the Developmental Optometrist may prescribe any number of special

interventions such as special lenses or visual training exercises to correct the problem.

STEP THREE:

If the eyes seem to be in good working order, the next step is to seek an evaluation from a trained Irlen Screener. S/he will collect information about how your eyes process visual information. If you have symptoms consistent with Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome or the Irlen Syndrome, s/he will make arrangements to have you tested to determine the most appropriate colour for a pair of Irlen lenses which are ordered from California at the time of this publication.

Q#6: Why shouldn't I just get Irlen lenses in the first place?

A: I encourage you to do whatever you feel is the right thing to do. However, it is my belief that these glasses are expensive. They can be of great use to people who really need them. But what if you were in the first category of people who only needed to use the coloured overlays for a short period of time? You may have spent a lot of your hard-earned money unnecessarily.

Q#7: Is the colour that is used in the plastic overlay the same colour I will have my lenses tinted?

A: From the experiences I have had with my clients, I would say that the colour of the lenses is almost always different from the plastic coloured overlay. There is some speculation as to why this is, but I do not know the reason. For further reading on this subject, see the book by Rhonda Stone, listed at the end of this handout.

Q#8: Why couldn't I just have a local optician tint my glasses the appropriate colour?

A: There are two reasons that this may be difficult. Firstly, the Irlen people claim that it is necessary to follow a special process that is used in the California tinting. Secondly, if you just know what colour works as an overlay, you will not necessarily know which colour would be most appropriate for your lenses. Remember, it is usually different.

I believe that scientifically controlled research is needed in this area to assess the relative effectiveness of the California versus local tinting methods.

Q#9: Do I have to wear my Irlen lenses all the time?

A: How often you wear your Irlen lenses depends on the situations that you benefit most from their use.

Q#10: Where can I find someone to do the testing you talk about?

A: To test whether or not a coloured overlay could be of benefit to you (or your child or other loved one) ask your local resource teacher or special needs professional to order a set of overlays from the National Reading Styles Institute (NSRI). You can also order them yourself from the NSRI at P.O. Box 737, Syosset, New York, NY 11791-0737. Call 1.800.331.3117 or 1.516.921.5500 or FAX 1.516.921.5591 or www.nrsi.com or email nrsi@mindspring.com. A complete test kit of large 8.5 inch x 11 inch sheets in 8 colours costs about \$29.95 US funds plus shipping and handling.

Empowerment Plus®, Inc. sells a small fan set of 8 coloured overlays (1/2 x 5 inches) that can be purchased for \$15.00 Canadian plus 15% shipping and handling. See our address or toll free number below.

For Developmental Optometrists in the Calgary area contact the offices of Dr. Margaret Penny at 1.403.272.9104 or Dr. Laurie Dodds at 1.403.262.5972. For other resources see www.optometrists.org.

For Irlen Screeners in the Calgary area see Mrs. Carol Hamm at 1.403.652.5672 or dhamm@telusplanet.net. For other resources, see www.Irlen.com.

Q#11: How can I find out more about the Irlen Syndrome?

A: The two books I have found most helpful are: Helen Irlen's Reading By the Colors and Rhonda Stone's The Light Barrier.

Q#12: How can I get trained in becoming an Irlen Screener?

A: Contact Beverly Butt in Western Canada at the Irlen Centre Western Canada 4017 Gordon Rd. Regina, Sask. S4S 6G6 1.306.584.9124 or email bbutt@sasktel.net or see www.irlen.com.

Q#13: How did you get involved in using the coloured overlays?

A: I had heard about the Irlen Syndrome for several years before I decided it was time to pay attention to it. Over the last 7 years, I have been impressed with the kind of a difference the use of coloured overlays and when warranted, Irlen lenses has made for some of my clients. It has also been interesting to observe that people are quite variable in their use of the overlays and glasses.

Q#14: How does the use of the coloured overlays fit into your approach with people?

A: I am a psychologist who has been in practice for over 30 years. During this time, I have developed a method called Empowerment Plus®. This involves a wholistic approach to concerns in the areas of attention (AD/HD), learning (LD) and/or depression. During this process we try to help you understand how you function best, in the areas of attention, learning, personality and food sensitivities. While investigating the section related to learning, we routinely use coloured overlays to screen out any concerns in visual processing. Then we follow the method outlined above.

Q#15: Where can I find out more about a wholistic approach to AD/HD, LD or depression?

A: Contact me at the address or phone numbers below and request information concerns books, videos and other resources.

Q#16: How can I get trained in using the Empowerment Plus® model with my students or clients?

A: See the Training section on the Resources page on the website www.empowermentplus.org or contact me at the addresses or phone numbers below:

Dr. Teeya Scholten, C. Psych.
Empowerment Plus®, Inc.
Suite 217 811 14th St. N.W.
Calgary, AB. T2N 2A4
Phone (403) 230-2959
Fax (403) 270-2650
Toll Free – 1-888-Dr. Teeya

NOTE: I am also interested in learning of your experiences in this area. Please consider letting me know by providing feedback through the website at www.empowermentplus.org. Thanks!