

Walk the Plank (visual attention & fixation flexibility)

This activity helps the eyes develop the ability to focus quickly after shifting their gaze from one location to another. Being able to shift your gaze accurately and effortlessly is an important skill required to easily orient yourself within any given environment. This skill will you navigate lines of text and fixate on words efficiently, which is important to become fluent in reading, leaving you with plenty of energy to enjoy what you read rather than feeling exhausted by the process of reading.

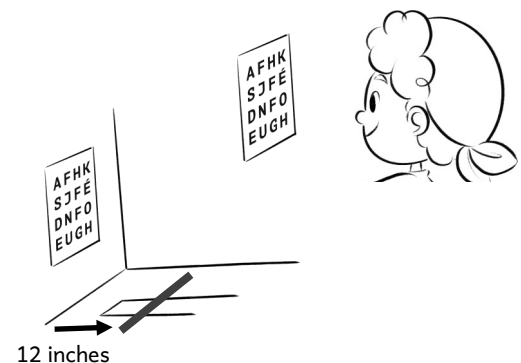


What you need

- A Hart chart* (numbers or letters)
- A plank made from a towel or a long piece of paper (about 12 inches wide and 3 feet long)
- Measuring tape
- Optional: metronome to provide a consistent pace (many free apps are available)
- An eye patch (note, you can download directions for a DIY pirate eye patch)
- A tracking sheet to document your practice
- You'll need two people for this activity: one person who, like Max, does the activities (we will call this person Max in the directions below), and one person who, like Gina, guides the activity (we will call this person Gina in the directions below).

Preparation

- If you don't have an eye patch, make one following the DIY pirate eye patch instructions.
- Download a Hart chart* and a tracking sheet from the website.
- Hang the Hart chart on a wall. Put it at Max's eye level and position the plank parallel to the wall, so that when Max stands on the plank, the chart is right in front of him.
- Make sure no sharp objects are around in case Max wobbles. Be ready to lend a supporting hand.
- Mark on the plank a distance that is about 12 inches from the wall.



* Hart charts are often used in vision therapy to train and improve different visual skills. They may use different shapes, symbols, letters, and numbers in different sizes, spacings, and positions. They help exercise the eye muscles and processing of visual information. Doing varied exercises with Hart charts can improve things like eye tracking, depth perception, concentration, peripheral vision, and hand-eye coordination.

Activity

This activity can be done in a standing position (standing on both legs or one leg), and with and without an eye-patch. For children who are doing this activity for the first time, start them standing on both legs and with an eye patch (Level 1).

Level 1 – Emerald

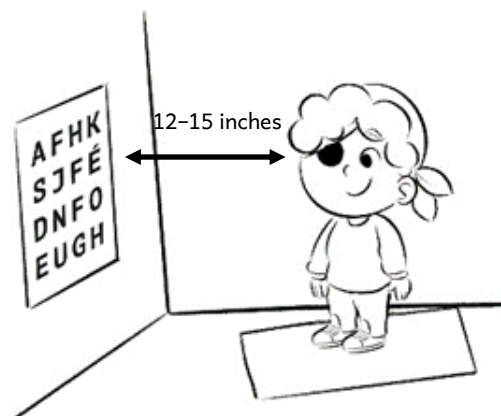
This activity is done in a standing position, with an eye patch.

You playing Max:

- Stand on the plank with your legs hip-width apart.
- Stand an average reading distance (12-15 inches) away from the wall by standing behind the marked line on the plank.
- Complete three practice rounds with each eye.

You playing Gina:

- Give Max the directions for each round. DON'T point to any letters or numbers on the chart. Have Max rely solely on your verbal instructions.
 - ◇ Round 1: "Name the first letter (or number) on the first line, then the last letter (or number) on the first line. Next, name the second letter (or number) on the first line, followed by the second to last letter (or number) on the first line. Continue until you have named all the letters (or numbers) on the first line."
 - ◇ Round 2: "Name the first letter (or number) on the first line, then the last letter (or number) on the first line. Next, name the first letter (or number) on the second line, followed by the last letter (or number) on the second line. Continue until you have named all first and last letters (or numbers) on all lines."
 - ◇ Round 3: "Name the first letter (or number) on the first line, then the last letter (or number) on the last line. Next, name the first letter (or number) on the second line, followed by the last letter (or number) on the second to last line. Continue until you have named all the first and last letters (or numbers) on all lines."
- Ensure Max maintains a constant rhythm.
- Document Max's accuracy. Note whenever Max seems to take longer identifying a letter (or number) or is struggling to name a particular letter (or number). You may notice that it occurs more frequently when Max is identifying a number that is toward the middle of a line (or column). Whenever Max makes a mistake or you notice guessing, ask him about the clarity of such letters (or numbers). Note any letters (or numbers) that did not look crisp to Max. Asking Max whether targets are clear helps him become more aware of whether or not things look crisp to him. Note how many times Max wobbles and or steps off the plank. Give Max lots of opportunities to overcome potential difficulties.



- Once Max can successfully complete the rounds described above with both eyes, you can make up additional formats, for example:
 - ◇ Replace lines with vertical columns: "Name the first letter (or number) in the first column, then the last letter (or number) in the last column. Next name the second letter (or number) in the second column, followed by the second to last letter (or number) in the second to last column..."
 - ◇ Replace the first and last lines (or columns) with the second, third, fifth... lines (or columns) to make it a little harder. For some children it can be more difficult to identify letters (or numbers) toward the middle of a line (or column) as opposed to focusing on letters (or numbers) that are on the first or last lines (or columns): "Name the first letter (or number) on the second line, then the last letter (or number) on the second line. Next name the second letter (or number) on the second line, followed by the second to last letter (or number) on the second line..."

Important Note

Some children may struggle with one eye more than with the other eye or standing on one leg as opposed to standing on the other leg or standing on both legs. Pay attention to these patterns and allow for extra practice as necessary. Also pay attention to potential guessing. This is not a race or a guessing game, nor do we want for targets to be noted as clear if they are not. Again, asking Max whether targets are clear helps him become more aware of whether or not things look crisp to him. This is important. Many children do not realize that how they see is not how everyone else sees. If you notice any of these behaviors, reduce the difficulty level to where the behavior started to emerge and gradually increase the difficulty again as Max is successful.

Recommended Practice

Complete 3 rounds, 2-3 times per day, 3-5 days per week depending on practice need. Notable improvements can be achieved within days or weeks, depending on initial proficiency level.

More Advanced Levels

Only move to more advanced levels if the current level can be completed successfully. You may download additional Hart charts from the website.

Level 2 - Sapphire

Use the same setup from Level 1. This activity is also done in a standing position but without an eye patch.

Follow the same directions and recommendations.

You playing Max:

- Stand on the plank with your legs hip-width apart.
- Stand an average reading distance (12-15 inches) away from the wall by standing behind the marked line on the plank.
- Complete three practice rounds with both eyes (without an eye patch).



You playing Gina:

- Give Max the directions for each round. You can reuse the directions from Level 1 or get creative and make up additional formats. Create formats that have Max move his eyes horizontally, vertically, and diagonally. DON'T point to any letters or numbers on the chart. Have Max rely solely on your verbal instructions.
- Monitor the activity as described under Level 1. Ensure Max maintains a constant rhythm.
- Document Max's accuracy. Note whenever Max seems to take longer identifying a letter or number or is struggling to name a particular letter or number. You may notice that it occurs more frequently when Max is identifying a number that is toward the middle of a line (or column). Whenever Max makes a mistake or you notice guessing, ask him about the clarity of such targets. Note any targets that did not look crisp to Max. Asking Max whether targets are clear helps him become more aware of whether or not things look crisp to him. Note how many times Max wobbles and or steps off the plank. Give Max lots of opportunities to overcome potential difficulties.

Level 3 - Fire Agate

Use the same setup from Level 1, but the activity is done standing on one leg, with and without an eye patch. Follow the same directions and recommendations.

You playing Max:

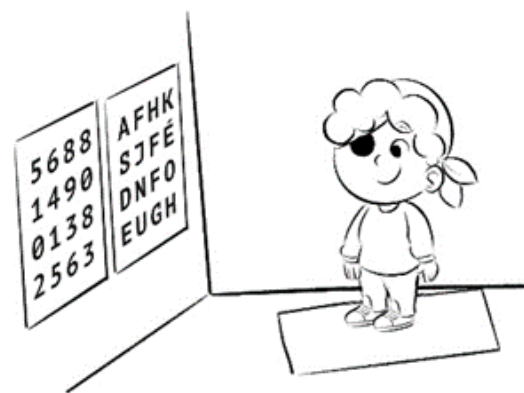
- Stand on one leg. Practice with each leg. Practice with and without an eye patch.
- Complete three rounds with an eye patch on your right eye, three rounds with the eye patch on your left eye, and three rounds without an eye patch.

**You playing Gina:**

- Make sure no sharp objects are around in case Max wobbles. Be ready to lend a supporting hand.
- Give Max the directions for each round. You can reuse the directions from Level 1 or get creative and make up additional formats. Create formats that have Max move his eyes horizontally, vertically, and diagonally.
- Monitor the activity as described under Level 1. Ensure Max maintains a constant rhythm.
- Document Max's accuracy. Note whenever Max seems to take longer identifying a letter or number or is struggling to name a particular letter or number. You may notice that it occurs more frequently when Max is identifying a number that is toward the middle of a line (or column). Whenever Max makes a mistake or you notice guessing, ask him about the clarity of such targets. Note any targets that did not look crisp to Max. Asking Max whether targets are clear helps him become more aware of whether or not things look crisp to him. Note how many times Max wobbles and or steps off the plank. Give Max lots of opportunities to overcome potential difficulties.

Level 4 - Blue Fluorite

Use the same setup from Level 1, but letters (or numbers) are read from two Hart charts that are spaced about 2 feet apart. Do this exercise standing on both legs, with and without an eye patch. Follow the usual instructions and recommendations.



You playing Max:

- Stand on the plank with your legs hip-width apart, same distance from the wall.
- Complete three practice rounds with and without an eye patch.

You playing Gina:

- Make sure no sharp objects are around in case Max wobbles. Be ready to lend a supporting hand.
- Give Max the directions for each round. DON'T point to any letters or numbers on the chart. Have Max rely solely on your verbal instructions:
 - ◇ You can reuse the directions from Level 1 and simply adapt them for two charts, for example: "Name the first letter (or number) on the first line on Chart 1, then the last letter (or number) on the first line on Chart 2. Next name the second letter (or number) on the first line on Chart 1, followed by the second to last letter (or number) on the first line on Chart 2..."
 - ◇ You can create additional formats, for example:
 - ◆ Replace lines with vertical columns: "Name the first letter (or number) in the first column on Chart 1, then the last letter (or number) in the first column on Chart 2. Next name the second letter (or number) in the first column on Chart 1, followed by the second to last letter (or number) in the first column on Chart 2..."
 - ◆ Replace the first and last lines (or columns) with the second, third, fifth... lines (or columns) to make it a little harder. For some children it can be more difficult to identify letters (or numbers) toward the middle of a line (or column) as opposed to focusing on letters (or numbers) that are on the first or last lines (or columns): "Name the first letter (or number) on the second line on Chart 1, then the last letter (or number) on the second line on Chart 2. Next name the second letter (or number) on the second line on Chart 1, followed by the second to last letter (or number) on the second line on Chart 2..."
- Monitor the activity as described under Level 1. Ensure Max maintains a constant rhythm.
- Document Max's accuracy. Note whenever Max seems to take longer identifying a letter or number or is struggling to name a particular letter or number. You may notice that it occurs more frequently when Max is identifying a number that is toward the middle of a line (or column). Whenever Max makes a mistake or you notice guessing, ask him about the clarity of such targets. Note any targets that did not look crisp to Max. Asking Max whether targets are clear helps him become more aware of whether or not things look crisp to him. Note how many times Max wobbles and or steps off the plank. Give Max lots of opportunities to overcome potential difficulties.

Level 5 - Tiger's Eye

Use the same setup from Level 4. Do this exercise standing on one leg, with and without an eye patch. Follow the usual instructions and recommendations.

You playing Max:

- Stand on one leg. Practice with each leg. Practice with and without an eye patch.
- Complete three practice rounds with and without an eye patch.

You playing Gina:

- Make sure no sharp objects are around in case Max wobbles. Be ready to lend a supporting hand.
- Give Max the directions for each round. DON'T point to any letters or numbers on the chart. Have Max rely solely on your verbal instructions:
 - ◇ You can reuse the directions from Level 1 adapted for two charts, for example: "Name the first letter (or number) on the first line on Chart 1, then the last letter (or number) on the first line on Chart 2..."
 - ◇ Mix things up for additional rounds by replacing lines with vertical columns and first and last lines (or columns) with lines (or columns) more toward the middle of the chart.
- Monitor the activity as described under Level 1. Ensure Max maintains a constant rhythm.
- Document Max's accuracy. Note whenever Max seems to take longer identifying a letter or number or is struggling to name a particular letter or number. You may notice that it occurs more frequently when Max is identifying a number that is toward the middle of a line (or column). Whenever Max makes a mistake or you notice guessing, ask him about the clarity of such targets. Note any targets that did not look crisp to Max. Asking Max whether targets are clear helps him become more aware of whether or not things look crisp to him. Note how many times Max wobbles, puts his foot down, or steps off the plank. Give Max lots of opportunities to overcome potential difficulties.

