

# **The Irlen Method for Learning Problems**

by Sara Malka Ladderman, Where What When, Baltimore, MD

Do you have trouble reading? Get headaches or migraines from reading, fluorescent bulbs, glare? Have problems with depth perception (catching a ball, bumping into things, etc.)? Do you struggle to keep up at school or work and get little relief from costly therapies and tutoring?

## **Improved Reading, Math, Comprehension in One Hour**

If you or your child are among 17 million Americans with a light sensitivity known as Irlen (scotopic sensitivity) Syndrome, you may want to visit a specialist in the Irlen Method. Shoshana Shamberg, OTR/L, MS, is a certified Irlen diagnostician at the new Irlen Visual Learning Center of Maryland at Ruscombe Community Health Center, Azman Eye Care, and the Amen Clinic of DC. After choosing the correct set of color overlays that filter out bothersome glare, Shamberg places the simple \$7 overlay over a page or computer screen, and words stop wobbling, fading, and forming weird patterns on the page. Text becomes clearer and easier to read. Chronic migraines and headaches can fade or disappear. Reading fluency, comfort, comprehension, attention, and concentration often improve within minutes – a sure sign the reader has Irlen Syndrome, or scotopic sensitivity syndrome.

Irlen Syndrome, hereditary and usually present from birth, varies from mild to severe and gets worse with smaller print, glossy white pages, extended reading, and indoor lighting, especially fluorescent. “I always have a parent in the room during testing to see the immediate improvement,” adds Shamberg, a licensed occupational therapist with a master’s in special education and assistive technology and 35 years in private practice, public and private school consulting, and national in-service trainings. Amazed and relieved to finally find a solution to life-long problems, clients ask why teachers, therapists, and doctors never mentioned the Irlen Method. They want to know how something so simple can be so effective and immediate.

## **Origins of the Irlen Method – Finding Accuracy and Comfort while Reading**

Helen Irlen, a reading specialist and educational psychologist, invented and began using Irlen Overlays and Lens Filters with dyslexic adults and children in 1983. Each of her students had a unique color, or many layers of different colors, that made it easier to see letters or numbers. Words that used to “float off the page, sway, flicker, or disappear, etc.” held still for the first time in their lives. Reduced glare made reading more less fatiguing. They could read longer, with more accuracy under a variety of intensities and types of lighting. “You can often see the client’s body visibly relax with the correct color overlay or filter,” Shamberg says. Since Irlen’s original discovery, over 30 international Irlen Diagnostic Centers have been established, tens of thousands of Irlen clients have been helped with Irlen Overlays and Spectral Filters, and over 25 years of evidenced-based international research has been conducted by medical and educational professionals, universities, government agencies, school systems, and organizations.

## **How Can Simple Color Overlays or Tinted Lens Treat Such Wide-Ranging Problems?**

Light sensitivity affects how the brain processes the offending light rays to form images and access information. When light sensitivity causes inaccurate processing of what you see, learning challenges, physiological problems, emotional problems, sensory overload, and decreased movement may result. Freeing the brain from stress overload can improve mental clarity, energize the mind and body, assist in auditory and visual processing, and improve immune system function. If you don’t need to work so hard to process visual information, your mind will be more available to process sound, and will be less bothered by tastes, odors, and textures of clothing.

## **Using Color Overlays vs. Glasses**

Overlays test whether the Irlen Method works for reading. But only colored lenses, tinted or plano lenses, can consistently calm the nervous system and improve balance, coordination, handwriting, stamina, depth perception, focus, sports performance, and visual tasks other than reading. Diagnosis by a trained Irlen diagnostician involves 90 lens colors and hundreds of combinations. “That’s why it can take three hours or more,” notes Shamberg. “One client needed four layers of the correct colors in the correct order, plus different lens shades and densities for outdoors and then indoors!” However, the average time for overlay screening is one hour and diagnostic testing for lenses is approximately 2 hours.

### **Cost-Effective Services**

The new Irlen Visual Learning Center of Maryland is a rich resource of services. “Few Irlen diagnosticians have my background in occupational therapy, special education, and sensory integration,” says Shamberg. “Plus, only a few diagnosticians in the world work directly with eye care specialists.” Dr. Irwin Azman, director of the Visual Learning Center of Maryland at Azman Eye Care, is an optometrist specializing in developmental issues. “Our clinic provides all these services, plus referrals, streamlining and coordinating services,” says Shamberg.

While Irlen doesn’t work for everyone, a free self-test may show a pattern of Irlen Syndrome symptoms. See [www.irlen.com](http://www.irlen.com) for the Irlen self-test, research articles, and a list of Irlen screeners nationwide. The Irlen Visual Learning Center will offer a free one-hour training and demonstration each month and can bring this training to your location and staff as well. Also available is a two-hour training for teachers, classroom assistants, therapists, and interested parent advocates on the Pre-Assessment Screening for Irlen Syndrome (PASS), an easy, quick screening tool for classroom and resource room use. The cost for the three hours is only \$100 and includes a resource package, assessment tools, and an interactive and multimedia presentation. A certificate of completion and CEUs will be provided for OTs and any other professionals requesting documentation of attendance for the full three-hour training. Please email for the exact dates and times of these programs.

For more information about **The Irlen Visual Learning Center of MD at Ruscombe Community Health Center ([www.ruscombe.org](http://www.ruscombe.org)) in Baltimore, MD and Azman Eye Care in Timonium, MD**, a free copy of the Irlen Self-Evaluation, to join our newsletter mailing list, and to attend our FREE Irlen Introduction Trainings and PASS or Irlen Screeners Trainings, contact our office (410) 358-7269 or email us at [IrlenVLCMD@yahoo.com](mailto:IrlenVLCMD@yahoo.com).