Lesson

5

Learning the Art of Effortless Focus

How to

See

with

Perfect Sight

Your Comprehensive Guide

Beginning Rest & Focus

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5

Rest & Central Fixation

Learning the Art of Effortless Focus

by Gloria Ginn

> "The person with normal sight never tries to see. If for any reason, such as the dimness of the light or the distance of the object, he cannot see a particular point, he shifts to another. He never tries to bring out the point by staring at it, as the person with imperfect sight is constantly doing." — William H. Bates, M.D.

Doris told her doctor, "When I'm at home on Sundays, I can read the newspaper just fine. And when I'm on vacation, I have no trouble reading the menus in the restaurants. But when I'm at work, I cannot read the paperwork without glasses."

Her doctor replied, "You don't read the newspaper on Sundays." She was incredulous, and exclaimed "I just told you I did !"

She was still seeking an answer to her question (why her vision was better sometimes than it was at others) when she met me six months later. The answer was simple: When she read the Sunday papers or was away on vacation, she was relaxed mentally. There was no effort to see.

When she was at work, her mind was under a strain. The mental tension caused eye tension and blurred her vision.

Do Without Doing

She needed to learn how to stay relaxed and focused at the same time (the only way to truly focus). The Chinese call it "Wei wu wei," or "Do without doing." It is the art of effortless focus.

Dr. Bates called it central fixation. Aldous Huxley named it dynamic relaxation. This is not the passive flop-on-the-couch type of relaxation. It is relaxation through action.

One year, a young woman named Flo-Jo swept the Olympics, winning medal after medal. In an interview, a reporter asked her:

"What goes on in your mind when you are half-way to the finish line, and your competitors are just a head's length behind you?" She answered, "Oh, Lord, help me keep the relaxation!"

All top performers — in any field — are experts at dynamic relaxation. It allows the mind and body to work at their peak level, without obstruction.

Tension blocks circulation, confuses the mind, dulls the senses and blurs the vision. Imperfect sight is always accompanied by a mental strain to see. This strain must go for clarity to return.

Effortless Focus

Dr. Bates says, "The cause of [imperfect sight] is simply a thought — a wrong thought — and the cure is as quick as the thought that relaxes."

With normal sight, there is hardly a thought about how focusing takes place. It is unconscious; it "just happens."

When the sight is imperfect, there is a belief, whether conscious or unconscious, that focusing requires effort. This thought — all by it-self — is enough to blur the vision.

But it doesn't stop there. The effort is compounded by all the erroneous ideas we have about how the mind and eyes focus: We stare and try to concentrate, in the mistaken belief that we would focus better if we could exclude the peripheral vision and hold the mind and eyes on one point continuously.

Mind and Vision

Both mind and eyes focus the same way. Clarity of vision depends on relaxation of the mind. Clarity of mind depends on focus of the eyes.

You can't have one without the other. If the mind is tense, the eyes are tense. If the mind is focused, the eyes are focused.

Because of the relationship between mind and eye, the same techniques that restore perfect sight also focus the mind with maximum clarity.

We sincerely believe that to see, understand or "grasp" an idea we must make an effort. We fear if we don't "do" something, we won't succeed. And that very fear leads to failure.

Giving Up Effort

"Palming can only accomplish relaxation when the patient does not try to see while palming.

"Some people realize that when their eyes are closed and covered with the palms of the hands, it is not possible to see anything, and they do not try.

"But other people may strain their eyes to see while palming, although they know it is wrong. In such cases, it is very evident that mental control is lost. They do things they do not plan to do.

"Some people can let their minds drift from one thing to another without much, if any effort. Some cases become able to palm more successfully than others."

— *W. H. Bates, M.D.*

It is this wrong thought that is the problem. The truth is just the opposite: Focusing is easy and requires no effort. Maximum focus occurs from zero effort.

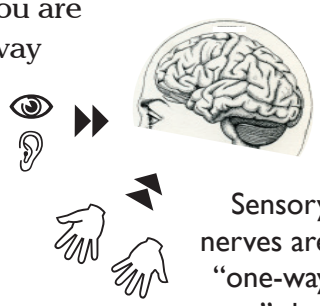
The visual and the mental are inseparable. You can't focus one without the other. Likewise, you can't defocus one without the other. As your mental state changes, your vision fluctuates. It can change in an instant — and does, for all people.

Normal sight is not normal all the time; imperfect sight is not imperfect all the time. It all depends on the level of mental relaxation (or strain) that is present at any given moment.

The retinal nerves are sensory nerves. They receive impressions from the outside world, and send those sensations to the brain

for processing. They are passive receptors of sensation, "one-way streets" that go only one direction: In toward the brain. Each of the five senses works in this way. Nerves of taste, touch, smell and hearing receive sensation and send it to the brain.

When you make an effort to see, you are trying to use sensory nerves in a way they are unable to to function. You are pushing outward on a door that only opens inwardly. This effort prevents the retinal nerves from functioning properly.



Sensory nerves are "one-way streets" that go one direction only: IN toward the brain.

Think of the word ***focus*** as a passive verb instead of an active one: Think "Things are seen," not "I am seeing," Relaxation of both the eyes and mind is necessary to see in this receptive way.

Tips to Help You Eliminate Effort

• **Stop using glasses**. When you first remove your glasses, the world will appear blurred. You may be tempted to put on your old glasses again, to see clearly. Every time you do, you delay your progress.

Even just a few minutes of using full-strength glasses can cause you to lose all the improvement you have gained. This lengthens the period of time it takes you to regain perfect sight. Continued use of full-strength glasses prevents permanent improvement.

When you use glasses, you trade the "cheap thrill" of a sharper image for long-term debility in your vision. Instead of reaching for glasses, reach for one of the vision techniques. These will keep your vision on an upward path.

> "The idea that treatment demands effort is eliminated as much as possible. The fact is repeatedly emphasized that the exercises of the eyes are not work or effort, but rather that everything recommended is to secure physiological rest of the eyes, a condition which is found only with central fixation and perfect vision."
>
> — *W.H. Bates, M.D.*

• **Never squint, stare or strain:** You may get snatches of sharper vision when you use trick vision (such as squinting your eyelids partly closed). However, this will never bring your eyesight to normal, and if you keep it up your eyesight will continue to get worse.

Staring blurs the vision. The clarity drops in proportion to the length of time you stare. It is not possible to hold the mind or eyes on one point continuously. They can only focus on one point for a fraction of a second without shifting. Replace the stare with shifting.

• **Ignore the blur**: Never try to clear up the blur. Forget about it. Ignore it. Instead of fighting it, think of the blur as an opportunity to improve your vision. If you never look at anything blurred, you have no opportunity to improve. There is simply no room for

improvement. You have to stretch your vision to go beyond where you are now.

• **Focus on what you DO see**: Imagine you are an impressionist artist and can see the world in a way no one else can. Notice what you see (color, shape and/or motion), without trying to change it. This clears up the vision. How? Because the eyes focus where the attention is.

A Lesson From a Daughter

One day a former student of mine, Nancy, was visiting a mountain town with her 20-year-old daughter, Kathy, whose eyesight is better than normal.

Nell was looking down the street to the other end of town, unsuccessfully trying to read a sign. She asked her daughter, "Kathy, can you read that sign over there — the yellow one with red letters?"

Her daughter took one look at the sign, replied, "No," and promptly looked at something else. Nell was astonished! When she related the story to me later, she exclaimed, "She [her daughter] didn't even try to see it!"

She was amazed at this response, because it illustrated so clearly what I had been trying to teach her for months: Vision is never perfect when there is an effort to see. Perfect sight comes effortlessly, and in no other way.

• **Shift, see the periphery and notice motion**: Here's what happened with one man did three things consistently:

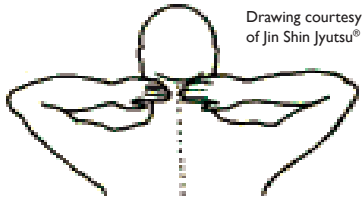
1. He used the shifter to get rid of built-up tension
2. Then he became aware of the peripheral vision
3. He noticed the apparent movement of stationary objects, as he went about his day

These improved his vision so much that he went directly from the lesson to the optometrist, who lowered the prescription from -7.75 to -5.00 diopters.

What did he do to improve his eyesight so easily? It wasn't what he did, it was what he ***stopped*** doing: He stopped trying to see.

• **See from the back of the head**: When the sight is normal and there is no effort to see, it feels as though you have no eyes, that you are seeing from the back of the head.

You may more easily be able to let go of effort if you consciously imitate this sensation, and see from the back of the head. This widens the periphery, eliminates strain and improves vision.



Drawing courtesy of Jin Shin Jyutsu®

The visual center of the brain is at the base of the skull. We literally see from the back of the head.

The visual center of the brain is in the back of the head. This is where the pictures you see are created. Light rays come into

the eyes, and the sensation travels through the optic nerves, which enter the brain in the back of the head at the occipital lobes (those bumps behind the ears).

Light comes through the eyes effortlessly, just as music comes to the ears. With normal hearing, you are unaware of your ears. To have normal sight, be just as unaware of your eyes.

I once suggested to an accountant that he put himself in the back of the head instead of reaching out and trying to see. He replied, "How can I 'put' myself somewhere?" He didn't understand it, but pondered the concept.

A few weeks later, he woke up and found himself seeing from the back of the head. At his lesson that day, he said he had been "in the back of the head" all day — and was able to read print smaller than he had ever read before: tiny, one-point microprint.

He read for an entire hour, easily, rapidly and continuously — all because he had learned to see from the back of the head.

Concentration: How NOT to Focus

Laurel suffered from splitting headaches, eyestrain and mental fatigue. The cause of her difficulty? She was trying very hard to concentrate.

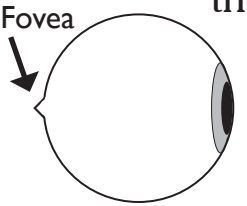
Believing that peripheral stimuli were distractions, she used a lot of effort to eliminate them. Did it help her focus? No. On the contrary, the effort to concentrate caused her to lose her focus: The mind became disoriented and scattered, her eyes hurt, and her head throbbed.

> Replace concentration with central fixation: See one thing ***best***, not one thing ***only***.

To those experienced in the ways of perfect sight, this is no surprise. Concentration doesn't work. Blocking out the periphery is a strain, and lowers the clarity of the center of sight. We do not focus by seeing one thing only. We focus by seeing one thing best and all other points not so well.

The eye stops for a fraction of a second at a time. In that split-second, it takes a picture. In that picture, there is only a tiny point of sharp clarity, directly in the center. The farther away from the center, the less distinct the image.

This phenomenon is called ***central fixation***. It occurs because only one tiny part of the eye, the fovea, is capable of seeing sharp detail. The fovea is a tiny pit in the center back of the eyeball, directly behind the pupil. The area which the eye sees best is so



tiny that it approaches the mathematical dot, i.e., with no area at all. I once pointed this out to a 14-year-old boy. He said, "They sure didn't design the eye very well, did they?" He thought the whole eye should be able to see detail.

I told him, "They probably designed the eye that way because they designed the mind that way." The eye takes in images the way the mind processes them:

The conscious mind perceives one detail best, and shifts rapidly to the next point best. The smaller the point seen best and the faster the shift, the sharper the focus — mentally and visually.

The subconscious takes in the peripheral impressions all at once, but in a more vague manner. The subconscious is capable of a level of multi-tasking that the conscious mind can only dream of. Most learning and interaction with the world is through the periphery. For example, driving is primarily a peripheral activity.

To focus clearly, either mentally or visually, both the center and its periphery are necessary.

How to Regain Your Focus

> "To see clearly, one must use the entire field of vision and see only one point best within that field at any given moment of time. The smaller the point seen best, the better the vision." — *William H. Bates, M.D.*

There are three important instructions in the above paragraph. Each is essential to see clearly:

1. "Use the entire field of vision." Open up your peripheral vision.

2. "See only one point best within that field at any given moment of time." Differentiate the center from its periphery, seeing the center point best.

3. "The smaller the point seen best, the better the vision." Refine your ability to differentiate closer-together points, so that you see a smaller point best at a time.

Step 1: Open up your peripheral vision

The goal is to see best where you are looking. But the word ***best*** is a relative word. It implies a comparison to something else. To see the center of sight best, it must be compared with the periphery.

The first step, then, is to open up your peripheral vision. Practice seeing the periphery around everything you see. This eliminates the effort of trying to see detail, and encourages sharper focus.

- When you look at a face, see the background around the person.

- When you read or write, see the periphery outside of the page.

Seeing the Periphery

This is especially important if you are nearsighted. That's because nearsighted people attempt to collapse the space between themselves and the visual object regarded, in a futile attempt to bring the object closer to see it.

This strain causes the image to appear larger than it really is. Nearsighted glasses compensate by reducing the size of the image.

Your eyes focus where your attention is. To see in the distance, you want to place your attention there. Noticing the periphery around an object defines where that object is in space. It brings your attention to it, instead of trying to bring the object to you.

- When you watch television or use a computer, see the periphery around the screen.

Amazing as it may sound, the wider the periphery, the smaller and sharper the center of sight. To see the smallest detail, see the widest periphery.

Step 2: Contrast the central and peripheral vision

Once you have established your awareness of the periphery, the next step is to differentiate it from the center of sight.

There are two ways to do this: You can either see the center best or the periphery worse.

1. For example, to see the center best, look at the back of a chair and notice that you see it better than the legs.

2. To see the periphery worse, look at the back of a chair and notice that the legs are less distinct.

Most people get better results by seeing the periphery worse. That's because this avoids the tendency to make an effort to force the center point to be clearer than it appears.

Notice that the periphery worse than the center of sight. Allow the periphery to be less distinct, to recede into the background, even when the peripheral point is very close to the center of sight. Allow is the operative word. It eliminates the effort.

Step 3: **Shift from a light to a blank surface**

It is usually easiest to observe that a detail looks worse in the periphery if you use a light as our object of focus. Here's how to do it:

- Look a colored light (street lights, neon signs, taillights on cars, etc.), and note its brightness.

- Look far enough away from the light that it appears dimmer and more spread out in the periphery. The color will also appears duller.

Practicing with lights can help your night vision improve

Practicing central fixation with lights (seeing the light dimmer and more diffuse in the periphery) is especially helpful in improving your night vision.

- Shift back to the light, and see it brighter. If successful, the light will appear sharper and more defined.

- Now compare two lights, such as taillights on a car, or two streetlights, perhaps. Shift your gaze from one to the other, allowing the peripheral light to be less bright and more diffused than the one in the center of sight.

When successful with lights, practice with colored objects or colored letters. Notice that the color is changes in the periphery and is less bright, less vivid than it appears when regarding it directly.

Step 4
Shift from a letter to a blank surface

- Put a letter-practice card at a distance at which you can read at least two-thirds of it

- Sway or do a head swing. The relaxation from the motion helps eliminate the effort to see. Shift across a line of letters, and notice the movement of the card against the background.

- Look six inches above or below the letter-card to a more-or-less blank surface, such as a field of grass or carpet, a blank wall, patch of sky, etc. See the letters worse in the periphery.

  Look only as far away as necessary to see the letters worse in the periphery (you should still be able to see a white card with black spots on it). If you look too far away, this technique won't work.

- Shift across the letters again. If successful, they will appear clearer than they did before.

Apply this same technique moment-to-moment with any detail, such as a face, cup, plant, objects on a desk, etc. For example, look at the face, then shift your gaze to the person's shoulder and notice that the face is seen less distinctly. Glance back at the face, and see it better.

Eliminating Multiple Images

The objective of the central fixation exercise is to see letters in the periphery worse than in the central vision.

But when multiple images are present, these multiples may appear to diminish when you see the letters in the periphery.

Because of this tendency, you may think the letter looks better when it is in your periphery. This is eccentric fixation, and is the opposite of what is desired.

One of the best ways to correct this is to ignore the changes in the multiples, but instead put the attention on some other quality of the letter that you can noticeably see looks worse in the periphery, for example noticing that the white space inside a letter (such as an R, B, S, A, etc.) is harder to see when the letter is in your periphery.

The Power of Central Fixation

Susie practically flew into my office. "Gloria," she said, "This is for real."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"My vision. I'm really going to have my sight back! It's really going to be there. This is for real."

"Right," I replied. "That's what you came here for. What's the problem?"

"But I didn't ***really*** believe it would happen!" she exclaimed.

"But then why have you been coming to lessons?" I wondered.

"I thought I'd learn a few things, we'd have some fun. But I never actually believed I'd have normal sight. It's really happening."

In less than two weeks, Susie's vision had improved from 20/400 to 20/40. She was a little shaken up by the fast change. Suddenly, her image of herself as a nearsighted person was altered — a disconcerting experience, even when the change had been desired for a long time.

What improved Susie's eyesight so dramatically was continuous central fixation practice — for up to six hours at a time! But she didn't take any extra time out of her day to do this. Instead, she practiced while working in her home office.

While talking on the telephone, she looked out her window at the Hollywood hills, and shifted her gaze from one bush to another, allowing the peripheral one to fade into the hillside while the central bush stood out with more detail.

Step 5
Practice continuous central fixation

Here's how to do Suzie's technique:

- Start with a photograph of a nature or city scene. Hold it at the distance where your vision is at its best. Look at one detail in the photo.

- Shift to another detail. See the first detail fade into

the whole picture, while the detail currently in your central vision stands out with more clarity.

- Keep shifting from one detail to another, allowing the last one to fade into the background.
- Then do the same technique with the picture at a farther distance, where it appears slightly blurred.
- Apply this with the scenery. See one detail best at a time. Shift to another detail best, and allow the last one to fade into the background.

Five Ways to Know You Are Focusing Correctly

1. The vision becomes clearer

This is the most obvious clue. When you are practicing properly, clarity comes instantaneously. There is nothing gradual about it; the instant you allow the periphery to look worse, the detail in the center of sight becomes sharper.

2. The detail becomes less distinct in the periphery

With imperfect sight, the central vision is not any clearer than the peripheral vision, and in some cases it is actually worse.

This is called eccentric fixation, and it is caused by the stare, which lowers the sensitiveness of the retinal nerves, the cones, located in the fovea, the center of sight. Without a change in stimuli every 1/100th of a second, these nerve cells stop working.

To restore perfect sight, it is essential to eliminate eccentric fixation, and see best in the center of sight. Try shifting farther away from one detail to another, far enough away that you can easily see the periphery worse.

Faster speeds produce sharper images. Shift more quickly from one point to another. As your vision improves, you can compare closer-together points to see one best at a time.

Eccentric fixation is often noticeable when stargazing with imperfect sight. The star regarded may fade, or disappear altogether, while the peripheral stars appear brighter.

You can rectify this by shifting more quickly from one star to another.

3. The color changes in the periphery

Color is most intense in the center of sight. In the peripheral vision, black is less black; white is less white. Colors may be altered in many ways: red may appear pink, orange or maroon, etc.

4. The image appears more three-dimensional

When you practice central fixation correctly, what you see will appear to be more three-dimensional.

This can be quite startling, as one student shares "I always thought I saw three-dimensionally, until the depth really kicked in and I realized how truly three-dimensional the world can be. Wow!"

5. The object appears to move

To perceive motion requires the proper use of both central and peripheral vision.

As you shift from one detail to another, the point you leave behind appears to move in the opposite direction. This movement is a result of the central vision shifting from one point to another.

With perfect sight, the motion is seen when shifting from top to bottom of one letter, without moving the head or eyes.

Effortless Focus

Dr. Bates wrote about a 65-year-old man he once interviewed. This man had never worn glasses. He could see 20/20 in the distance and read diamond type (4 point type: this size) when looking close up.

He had discovered for himself that rest improves vision. Here is how he described the experience:

"He noted, first, that when he tried hard to see, either at the near-point or at the distance, his vision invariably became worse, and the harder he tried, the worse it became. Evidently something was wrong with this method of using the eyes.

"Then he tried looking at things without effort, without trying to see them. He also tried resting his eyes by closing them for five minutes or longer, or by looking away from the page that he wished to read, or the distant object he wished to see.

"These practices always improved his sight, and by keeping them up he not only regained normal vision but retained it for 25 years.

" 'Doctor,' he said in concluding his story, 'When my eyes are at rest and comfortable, my vision is always good and I forget all about them.

" 'When they do not feel comfortable, I never see so well, and then I always proceed to rest them until they feel all right again. Closing my eyes rests them, and this I do quite often.

" 'I have become so expert that I can rest them by closing them for only a few seconds at a time. Momentary closure of the eyelids for a fraction of a second is beneficial to me.' "

****

If we all followed the advice of this man, we would all retain perfect sight our entire lives.

Contrary to popular opinion, focusing and relaxing are not opposites. They are dependent on each other: You can only relax by focusing and you can only focus by relaxing.

In their natural state, the mind and eyes are focused and relaxed. It takes effort to defocus them. This effort may be conscious or unconscious, but it is always present when the sight is imperfect.

So give up the strain. Let go of the effort to see. Let your curiosity focus your eyes on the detail. And discover the clarity of mind and eye that results from effortless focus.

Are you imagining — or trying to see?

The curiosity for detail can lead you down one of two paths: imagining detail or trying to see it. The first path leads to ever-better sight; the later to lowered vision. Take your pick.

Many people believe they are imagining detail when in reality they are simply staring at a point, trying to see it.

The proof is in the result. If you are imagining detail, you will see more clearly. If you are trying to see detail, your vision will become worse.

When confronted with objects beyond their range of sight, the normal-sighted person imagines the detail whereas the person with imperfect sight tries to see it.

So imitate the person with normal sight. Get in the habit of imagining a higher level of detail in what you see. You will then have perfect sight continuously.