

## Pre-Braille Learning Video Transcript, March, 2021

Pre-Braille skills and experiences presented to the child who has a visual impairment will foster and strengthen the basic learning foundation throughout their lives. These children can become curious to learn about their environment when we expose them to what is around them. They need parents, teachers and educators to provide every opportunity to explore their world. The ability to explore is key for the visually impaired learner. There are a number of skills that the visually impaired learner will develop through tactile exploration. One is spatial awareness. The second is scanning skills whereby the learner uses their arms and hands to reach and touch. The third is learning to tactually discriminate by comparing, categorizing and identifying while developing vocabulary to give labels and description to the objects of focus.

Children learn to scan and explore what is being shown by initially working hand over hand with the teacher moving their hands from the left side of the table to the center and then to the right side to find the object that is being introduced. Organization is key in all activities presented, whether at the early Pre-Braille learning stages or as the student evolves into a tactile learner when reading and writing in Braille. Organizational skills allow the student to understand location of the item as well as return the item to its original place. When introducing organizational type skills keep in mind that the vocabulary used should provide solid directions and spatial awareness. Some of this vocabulary is as follows; left right, top left, top right, bottom left, bottom right, center. With consistent practice, guidance from the adult and use of the appropriate vocabulary, the student will learn how to locate items and their placement at their table. Tactile sensitization and discrimination is a vital part of learning in order to become familiar with the different textures, surfaces, weights, sizes, shapes, smells and temperature of objects. Young learners need time to explore each item, its detail as well as its function.

Playing sorting games and matching games that include identification of objects through tactile exploration enables young learners to strengthen their discrimination skills and make comparative associations with their previous knowledge by providing the learner with a large descriptive vocabulary. For example; big, little, rough, soft, hard, jiggly, heavy, light. The learner can then begin to compare, categorize, comprehend and communicate what they are exploring.

Learners benefit by exposure to the real item when possible as this facilitates connection with familiar objects in the environment. The child displays curiosity of the apple and explores through smell, touch and taste. This is helpful as we move to the abstract form of the object such as in the tactile graphic format of the apple in its various segments. Here the child is expected to track and scan the graphic to gather information. At this time additional explanation, use of necessary vocabulary and repetition is required in order to solidify and reinforce the foundation of the concept and comparative recognition of the shape. With regular sensory exploration through concrete activities the young learner will develop the tools for comparative thinking based on real association. Eventually the learner can be introduced to abstract representation and make associations using a word, picture or symbol as a starting point. Tactile graphic pages are used as Pre-Braille reading exercises. The young learner develops organized scanning skills and the ability to use the fingertips to track trace and interpret tactile images.

Pages can be designed to develop and build scanning skills to trace, locate, identify, match, count and compare simple patterns and characters in a logical format. On this page the learner is scanning the line in order to find a different shape at the end of each one. Once discovered, the learner will be motivated to explore, trace and try to identify all the shapes.

Guidance when tracing shapes helps students learn how to scan from beginning to end. Providing a tactile dot at the starting point of a shape that is being scanned shows the learner where to start and when to stop. This will prevent continuous retracing.

On this page, the learner is tracking the dotted lines. Note the vertical dotted line running down the left side. This provides a guide to organize the page from left to right and top to bottom as one does when reading. The vertical tactile dotted line helps the child follow and look for key indicators.

Organization, scanning and tactile discrimination skills, with time for exploration, allow the child who has a visual impairment the opportunity to make those memorable connections with their environments.