

## Visual Crowding / Crowding Effect

Visual crowding (also known as **crowding effect**) can impact reading efficiency and speed. The more crowded the letters/words/lines, the less efficient and slower the reading speed. A teacher of visually impaired is able to assess and explore the effects of increasing spacing between letters/words/lines, on improved visual functioning.

Children with low vision may become overwhelmed with cluttered worksheets and whiteboards as well as print that is crowded together. Visual functioning may be improved by reducing the visual stimuli in the following ways:

- Use masks such as black pieces of cardboard to block out questions/information/text
- Reduce detail in illustrations/drawings/maps.
- Use simple fonts- 'sans serif font' types (ie. Helvetica, Arial, Century Gothic, Comic Sans and Verdana)
- Avoid decorative fonts, avoid italics as well as all capital letters within words.
- Use bold type because the thickness of the letters makes the print more legible.
- Use large print as specified by the vision consultant.
- Page layout-keep page design clear and uncluttered; keep drawings, tables and graphs simple.
- Add additional spacing:
  - **spacing between letters** (closely packed letters are more difficult to read)
  - **spacing between words** (closely packed words are more difficult to read)
  - **spacing between lines** (If lines of text are too close they can appear to merge making it difficult to read.
- The use of e-text on a computer assists with accessibility for improved visual spacing (as well as text size, contrast & audio)

Suggestions to improve visual crowding/spacing using the PC computer follow:

1. To add spaces between words:
  - (1) Click Control H to find **Replace** feature.
  - (2) In **Find what** space- place a single space (click the space bar once)
  - (3) In the **Replace with** space- put in 2 or 3 spaces (click space bar 2 or 3 spaces)
2. To add spaces between letters:

Click Control + A to highlight the document (Command + A on Macs).  
Press Control + D to go into the Font menu. To increase spaces between characters/letters- Click on the **Advanced tab**. Go to **Spacing** and click the ↓ on the Dropdown menu. Choose **Expanded**. Click on OK.
3. To add spaces between lines:

Click **Control + 2** for 2 line spacing (Command + 2 on Macs) or **Control + 5** for 1½ line spacing (Command + 5 on Macs). **or**

On the **Home** tab, in the **Paragraph** group, click **Line Spacing**.



*This is an example of bold Century Gothic font with expanded character spacing and 1½ line spacing*

♥ Thank you to Ross Ehalt and Lisa Graham-Hill for their expertise and assistance in compiling this information.