

# Questions I Forgot to Ask (or Didn't Know Enough to Ask) in Optometry School

Gregory Kitchener, O.D.

Kraskin Invitational Skeffington Symposium

January 17 – 19, 2026

Bethesda, MD

# Intro

- I'm going to begin by playing a short video featuring Bruce Wolff presenting at a meeting of the Baltimore Study Group. The sound and picture quality are not great, but it's short and brings up several important points.

## 3 Points

1. Skeffington held out a “Holy Grail” of what Optometry and Visual Training might be.
  - Like the mythical Knights of old, Bruce set out on his quest, arranging conditions in testing and training, constantly pursuing the ideal that Skeff said Optometry could be.
  - He says that it took him 10 years or more of developing and modifying until it began to look something like the “Grail” he was seeking. It was not exactly as Skeff presented it, but it was there.

## 3 Points

2. A second point that Bruce makes is that he did not routinely take phoria measurements.
  - He states that he had just never been able to fit them into his routine in a way that made it worthwhile.
  - Bruce was very aware of various notions about phorias, but those did not easily align with what he was looking to understand in visual performance.
  - There are probably as many notions about what phorias are and what they tell us as there are about how they should be taken.

# 3 Points

3. Which brings us to the third point in this brief video clip.

- There are many similar questions lying about that remain unresolved simply because we avoid engaging in the open, and often uncomfortable, discussions that would be necessary.
- Now that we've set the table, let's see if we can set out some delicacies.

# Issues to Consider (A)

A. Why do we feel compelled to measure the angle of strabismus?

- Are we so captivated by the obvious deviation that it is difficult to resist?
- Can the preoccupation with measuring the angle make it more difficult to understand strabismus?
  - Is this not the case for ophthalmology which needed and developed various measuring procedures as the way to plan surgery and evaluate surgical results?

## Issues to Consider (B)

B. If convergence is, “the coordinated movement of the two eyes toward fixation of the same near point,\*” then what is pseudo-convergence?

- Maybe it is a fictitious movement of the two eyes.
- For some reason the tolerance of BO prism has usurped the definition of convergence.
  - Theory predicts that plus lenses will exacerbate a convergence (Dorland’s definition) insufficiency because they will move the phoria in the exo direction and reduce BO ranges.

# Issues to Consider (B)

- However, experience suggests that plus lenses often improve convergence even while shifting the phoria toward exo and decreasing BO ranges. This has been labeled a pseudo-convergence insufficiency.
- I think that it would make more sense to maintain the long-accepted definition of convergence and label what happens with BO prism as pseudo-convergence since they are not the same.
- Actually, the response to BO prism can be described easily as “relative convergence,” but few seem to use that.



# Issues to Consider (C)

- C. Base Down prism is said to make a target appear Larger and Farther away and Base Up the opposite. Try this demonstration.
- Place some Base Down prism in front of one eye. With both eyes open, look at an object on the floor, 6 to 7 feet in front of you. You should see the object doubled. Sometimes it can take a moment to get things organized.
- Describe their position and size relative to each other. Very typically, one is larger and farther. Note which eye is seeing which target.
- Now look at an object on the ceiling 6 to 7 feet ahead of you. Again, the object should appear doubled. Note their relative position and size. Now which eye is seeing which target?
  - This can also be done with only one eye, but that becomes a different issue.

# Base Down (Up) Prism

- If the demo has been successful, it suggests that the apparent size and distance of the target is not strictly an optical function of the direction of the base.
- It's more a matter of how the field is structured or organized.

# Issues to Consider (D)

D. I have described an optical prescription as the result of a negotiation between the doctor and the patient. I think it may be necessary to add “and their ecology.”

- Too often I am seeing patients who had near-point visual difficulties and were treated successfully with the prescription of low plus lenses (with or without VT). Many of them are then being told (by the same practitioner or another) that they should discontinue the use of the near point lenses.

# Issues to Consider (D)

- What are the assumptions about the visual process, people, and their ecology that make this recommendation a logical conclusion?
- In a similar vein, I saw an article recently on how practitioners should deal with the **grieving** that a parent must experience when they are told for the first time that their child needs glasses.

# Issues to Consider (E)

E. There are a number of paired terms used to describe characteristics and functions of the visual system.

- Ambient/Focal, Magno/Parvo, Dorsal Stream/Ventral Stream, Central/Peripheral, (Where/What) ...
- At times, these seem to be used interchangeably. They really are not the same and we should make better use of them.
- But I really wanted to discuss the topographic distinction of Central/Peripheral

# Central/Peripheral

- What do we really mean when we talk about something like “Central/Peripheral Organization”?
- I think it can be a useful expression in certain situations and with certain audiences.
- Is it better suited to a 2 dimensional area?
- Does it really do a good job of describing the 3+ dimensional organization of a spatial volume?

# Central/Peripheral

- As our expressive needs and our audiences develop in sophistication, should we use terms that better communicate our understanding?

# Concluding

- Hopefully, I have left enough questions for the small group discussions.
- I think that meetings like this which facilitate your participation are necessary for our field to develop.
- Thank you for your time and attention. I cannot tell you how much I miss being there with you



