Visual Acuity (VA)
Using the Snellen Chart
History

• Snellen charts are named after the Dutch ophthalmologist Hermann Snellen who developed the chart in 1862.
• Snellen defined “standard vision”
• Snellen chart is placed at a standard distance: 20 ft in the US, or 6 meters in the rest of the world.
Terminology

• Ophthalmology-the science of the eye, its disorders, and diseases.
• Ophthalmologist-An MD who can diagnose disorders, prescribe medications or lenses, and perform surgical procedures.
• Optometrist-is NOT an MD but can diagnose vision problems, perform eye exams, and treat vision problems with eyewear or eye exercises.
Distance Visual Acuity

• Distance visual acuity is typically assessed using a Snellen chart.
  – May use E chart, pediatric picture chart, or alphabet chart
  – Patient stands 20 feet from chart at eye level
  – Eyes tested with corrective lenses worn
  – Record results as fraction with 20 feet on top
  – Both eyes remain open during the examination; no squinting or straining
  – Abbreviations: OD (right), OS (left), OU (both)
Types of Snellen Charts
What to do:

Prepare:

• First, prepare the room for the exam.
• Must be well lit.
• Make sure the marker is 20 feet from the Snellen E-Chart (20 feet is standard testing distance).
What to do:

The Exam:

• Second, Introduce yourself to the patient and explain what you will be doing.

• Give specific instructions. (pointing)

• Instruct the patient not to squint (This temporarily improves vision).

• Be sure the patient has not studied the chart before the test.

• If the patient wears contacts or glasses, instruct them to keep them on. Remember this is a vision test.
What to do:

The Exam:
• Third, Instruct the patient to keep both eyes open throughout the whole exam. This prevents squinting.
• Cover the left eye (os). The patient will start reading with their right eye. (This is standard)
• Repeat the test covering the right eye (od).
• Repeat the test with both eyes (ou).
Recording Results

Document:
1. Pt’s name
2. Date
3. Time
4. Visual acuity results: OD, OS, and OU.
5. Document any reactions that occurred while reading the chart.
6. Document whether the patient wore their eyewear.