

INTRODUCTION TO VISION AND OPTICAL INSTRUMENTS*

OpenStax College

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Figure 1: A scientist examines minute details on the surface of a disk drive at a magnification of 100,000 times. The image was produced using an electron microscope. (credit: Robert Scoble)

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Explore how the image on the computer screen is formed. How is the image formation on the computer screen different from the image formation in your eye as you look down the microscope? How can videos of living cell processes be taken for viewing later on, and by many different people?

Seeing faces and objects we love and cherish is a delight—one's favorite teddy bear, a picture on the wall, or the sun rising over the mountains. Intricate images help us understand nature and are invaluable for developing techniques and technologies in order to improve the quality of life. The image of a red blood cell that almost fills the cross-sectional area of a tiny capillary makes us wonder how blood makes it through and not get stuck. We are able to see bacteria and viruses and understand their structure. It is the knowledge of physics that provides fundamental understanding and models required to develop new techniques and instruments. Therefore, physics is called an *enabling science*—a science that enables development and advancement in other areas. It is through optics and imaging that physics enables advancement in major areas of biosciences. This chapter illustrates the enabling nature of physics through an understanding of how a human eye is able to see and how we are able to use optical instruments to see beyond what is possible with the naked eye. It is convenient to categorize these instruments on the basis of geometric optics (see Geometric Optics¹) and wave optics (see Wave Optics²).

¹"Introduction to Geometric Optics" <<http://cnx.org/content/m42449/latest/>>

²"Introduction to Wave Optics" <<http://cnx.org/content/m42496/latest/>>