



Herman Snellen (1834-1908) was a professor at the University of Utrecht, Netherlands and in 1884 he became the Director of the Nederlandsch Gasthuis Ooglijders, an eye hospital founded by his mentor Franciscus Cornelius Donders (1818-1889).

Dr. Snellen was a prolific writer on many ophthalmic topics including anterior synechiae, astigmatism, amaurotic eyes, sympathetic ophthalmia, the history of glaucoma treatment and eye examinations. He is, of course, most famous for his visual acuity charts, first published around 1860.

Snellen's accomplishment in visual acuity was to define a test for eyesight and a formula to express how well a person sees in the form of a fraction. This fraction is a ratio comparing the test subject's eyesight to that of a "standard" person. The ratio expresses how many chart objects can be seen at a specific number of feet, i.e. 20/20 would indicate that the test subject could see 2 chart objects at 20 feet. The original Snellen test card used the English alphabet, but in 1868 he devised a test card for illiterates that resembled a rotating "E".

Snellen's test charts and fraction are still standard today but he was certainly not the first or last person to create test charts. Before Snellen there was Heinrich Kuechler (1811-1873) who invented a chart in 1843 and **Eduard Jaeger Ritter von Jaxtthal (1818-1884)** whose chart was published in 1854. After Snellen's invention, several charts were made based on his fraction in different languages and some were made with different **test objects for illiterates and children**.