

The Visual-Spatial Learner: An Introduction

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Welcome to the wonderful world of the visual-spatial learner! We're excited to share with you information about this important learning style, and to share with you about recognizing, assessing, teaching, counseling and living with visual-spatial learners.

Many teachers try very hard to accommodate the various learning styles of their students, but this can be an overwhelming task, as some of the learning styles inventories and models are quite complicated. As a former classroom teacher myself, I know that there are a limited number of hours in the day, and even the most dedicated teacher cannot plan for all the different learning styles and intelligences of his or her students. Take heart! There's an easier solution. The visual-spatial learner model is based on the newest discoveries in brain research about the different functions of the hemispheres. The left hemisphere is sequential, analytical, and time-oriented. The right hemisphere perceives the whole, synthesizes, and apprehends movement in space. We only have two hemispheres, and we are doing an excellent job teaching one of them. We need only become more aware of how to reach the other, and we will have happier students, learning more effectively. I'd like to share with you how the visual-spatial learner idea originated. Around 1980, I began to notice that some highly gifted children took the top off the IQ test with their phenomenal abilities to solve items presented to them visually or items requiring excellent abilities to visualize. These children were also adept at spatial tasks, such as orientation problems. Soon I discovered that not only were the highest scorers outperforming others on the visual-spatial tasks, but so were the **lowest** scorers.

The main difference between the two groups was that highly gifted children also excelled at the auditory-sequential items, whereas children who were brighter than their IQ scores had marked auditory and sequential weaknesses. It was from these clinical observations and my attempt to understand both the strengths and weaknesses that the concept of the "visual-spatial learner" was born. Visual-spatial learners are individuals who think in pictures rather than in words. They have a different brain organization than auditory-sequential learners. They learn better visually than auditorally. They learn all-at-once, and when the light bulb goes on, the learning is permanent. They do not learn from repetition and drill. They are whole-part learners who need to see the big picture first before they learn the details. They are non-sequential, which means that they do not learn in the step-by-step manner in which most teachers teach. They arrive at correct solutions without taking steps, so "show your work" may be impossible for them. They may have difficulty with easy tasks, but show amazing ability with difficult, complex tasks. They are systems thinkers who can orchestrate large amounts of information from different domains, but they often miss the details. They tend to be organizationally impaired and unconscious about time. They are often gifted creatively, technologically, mathematically or emotionally. You can tell you have one of these children by the endless amount of time they spend doing advanced puzzles, constructing with Legos, etc., completing mazes, counting everything, playing Tetris on the computer, playing chess, building with any materials at hand, designing scientific experiments, programming your computer, or taking everything in the house apart to see how it operates. They also are very creative, dramatic, artistic and musical. Here are the basic distinctions between the visual-spatial and auditory-sequential learner:

AUDITORY-SEQUENTIAL

Thinks primarily in words
Has auditory strengths
Relates well to time
Is a step-by-step learner
Learns by trial and error
Progresses sequentially from easy to difficult material
Is an analytical thinker
Attends well to details
Follows oral directions well
Does well at arithmetic
Learns phonics easily
Can sound out spelling words
Can write quickly and neatly
Is well-organized
Can show steps of work easily
Excels at rote memorization
Has good auditory short-term memory
May need some repetition to reinforce learning
Learns well from instruction
Learns in spite of emotional reactions
Is comfortable with one right answer
Develops fairly evenly
Usually maintains high grades
Enjoys algebra and chemistry
Learns languages in class
Is academically talented
Is an early bloomer

VISUAL-SPATIAL

Thinks primarily in pictures
Has visual strengths
Relates well to space
Is a whole-part learner
Learns concepts all at once
Learns complex concepts easily; struggles with easy skills
Is a good synthesizer
Sees the big picture; may miss details
Reads maps well
Is better at math reasoning than computation
Learns whole words easily
Must visualize words to spell them
Prefers keyboarding to writing
Creates unique methods of organization
Arrives at correct solutions intuitively
Learns best by seeing relationships
Has good long-term visual memory
Learns concepts permanently; is turned off by drill and repetition
Develops own methods of problem solving
Is very sensitive to teachers' attitudes
Generates unusual solutions to problems
Develops quite asynchronously
May have very uneven grades
Enjoys geometry and physics
Masters other languages through immersion
Is creatively, mechanically, emotionally, or technologically gifted
Is a late bloomer