

Visual-Spatial Learners Under Pressure: The Dreaded Timed Test

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Have you ever had a hard time finding the word you're trying to say? Or one that truly matches the picture in your head? The process for a visual-spatial learner to translate mental images into words (or numbers) is much like a computer downloading graphics. It takes considerably longer for a computer to bring up an image than it does to bring up text. The visual-spatial learner must not only "download" mental images, but convert them to words, as well. When the pressure of a time limit is imposed, the task can become unbearable, if not impossible.

I have a funny story for you about my *very* visual-spatial son, Matt: One day, we were in the car headed out and as I was backing out the driveway, he started panicking saying, "No! I'm not ready, don't go!" "What's wrong?" I called back. "I can't get the backward seven to work!" he hollered as the panic level in his voice continued to rise. I kept backing up while thinking, "Backward seven? What is it? Why does he need it?" As I started to drive forward, Matt started really getting upset and begging me to not keep driving. I looked back at him to see that he couldn't get his seatbelt fastened, which, from his vantage point, was clearly a backward seven! Because Matt could only see the picture and because there was an issue of time involved (he knew better than to be in a forward-moving car with no belt on), he could not translate that picture into a word. His ability to communicate to me what was wrong was reduced to an image that he was trying, but failing, to convey. He was left with a "backward seven" because he couldn't translate it to a seatbelt.

This happens a lot to visual-spatial kids when they are taking timed tests. They just can't translate their pictures into words (or numbers, if it's a math test) and they are greatly pressured knowing they have a limited amount of time in which to spit out the correct answer.



If you find this happening and there doesn't seem to be any way you're going to get out of taking timed tests, try these tips to help you speed up your translation time:

- Play games with that require answers within the time of a minute glass (mini hourglass). Cranium, Scattergories and Boggle are good examples.
- Add a timer to their favorite game. By putting a limit on Scrabble or Upwords, you've simulated taking a timed spelling test. Adding a minute glass to Yahtzee may help simulate a timed math test.
- Play Pictionary for "reverse" translation: words into pictures, with a time limit involved. Charades may help with this, too!
- While you're in the car, you can play games like "I'm Going on Safari" where each player thinks of what they'll bring in alphabetical order. So, the first player says, "I'm going on safari and I'm going to bring ___ (something that starts with the letter "a"). Then the second player says, "I'm going on a safari and I'm going to bring (what the first player said) plus ___ (something that starts with the letter "b"). And so on through the alphabet. This requires them to keep words (or pictures they must translate into words) in their minds through the entire game/alphabet.

If playing games with timers makes you too anxious—don't do it. At least play a game without a timer every once in a while. Perhaps you could start with longer time limits and gradually decrease them to eliminate any anxiety. Minute glasses that have no audible ticking would also help.

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