

Guidelines for Teaching Visual-Spatial Learners (VSLs)

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1. Present ideas visually on the chalkboard or on overheads. "A picture is worth a thousand words." Use rich, visual imagery in lectures.
2. Teach the student to visualize spelling words, math problems, etc. An effective method of teaching spelling is to write the word in large, colored print and present it to the student at arm's length, slightly above eye level. Have her close her eyes, visualize the word, then create a silly picture of the word in her mind. Then have her spell it backwards (this demonstrates visualization), then forwards, then write it once.
3. Use inductive (discovery) techniques as often as possible. This capitalizes on the visual-spatial learner's pattern-finding strength.
4. Teach the student to translate what he or she hears into images, and record those images using webbing, mind-mapping techniques, or pictorial notes.
5. Incorporate spatial exercises, visual imagery, reading material that is rich in fantasy, and visualization activities into the curriculum. Spatial conceptualization has the ability to go beyond linear thinking because it deals more readily with immense complexities and the interrelations of systems.
6. To accommodate introverts, allow the student to observe others before attempting activities. Stretch wait time after questions and have all students write answers before discussing. Develop a signal system during class discussions that allows introverts to participate.
7. Avoid drill, repetition, and rote memorization; use more abstract conceptual approaches and fewer, more difficult problems.
8. Teach to the student's strengths. Help the student learn to use these strengths to compensate for weaknesses. Visualization and imagination are the visual-spatial learner's most powerful tools and should be used frequently.
9. Allow the student to use a computer for assignments, and, in some subjects, for instruction. Teach the student how to use a keyboard effectively.
10. Give untimed power tests. Students with severe processing lags can apply to take their college board examinations untimed if the disability is documented through IQ and achievement testing within three years of the exams, and if teachers have provided extended time for tests.
11. Give more weight to the content of papers than to format. These students often suffer from deficits in mechanics: spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, etc.
12. Allow the student to construct, draw or otherwise create visual representations of a concept as a substitute for some written assignments.
13. If a bright student struggles with easy, sequential tasks, see if he can handle more advanced, complex work. Acceleration is more beneficial for such a student than remediation.
14. Expose VSLs to role models of successful adults who learn in a similar manner. Many of the most celebrated physicists were visual-spatial learners. Biographical sketches of famous visual-spatial learners can be found in *The Spatial Child* (Dixon, 1983), *In the Mind's Eye* (West, 1991), and the spatial intelligence chapter in *Frames of Mind* (Gardner, 1983).
15. Be emotionally supportive of the student. Visual-spatial learners are keenly aware of their teachers' reactions to them, and their success in overcoming their difficulties appears directly related to their perception of the teacher's empathy.