

About Spatial Learners

Betty Maxwell

There appear to be two major ways of learning: auditory-sequential (more left hemispheric) and visual-spatial (more right hemispheric).

Auditory-sequential learners are good listeners, learn well in a step-by-step process, tend to be rapid processors of information, and are generally able to express themselves well verbally. They are often able to compartmentalize their reasoning from their emotions.

In contrast, visual-spatial learners are excellent observers, comprehend holistically – may have sudden aha! understanding that leaps over steps – appear to think in images, may need translation time to put their ideas into words, and sometimes have word retrieval problems. Their thinking and emotions are very intertwined.

More about visual-spatial learners:

1. They have an excellent sense of direction and can remember how to get somewhere they have been. Inside a building, they will know what's above or below them.
2. They are excellent visualizers. They can learn to hold long words or strings of numbers in their mind's eye and work on them. (Many prefer mental math to written math.) They can manipulate, rotate and transform images. They can work with moving images.
3. They will remember what they see or visualize but may forget what they hear. They may mishear because of drifting attention or auditory processing problems.
4. They often have sequential weaknesses, particularly in handwriting. Phonics and memorization of math facts are also often weak areas.
5. They may be much better map readers than readers of printed lines. Left and right may be interchangeable for them, hence reversals and mirror writing and reading.
6. They do better with complex material; simple material is hard to hold their attention to.
7. They are disorganized, lose things easily, have a poor sense of time, don't plan ahead. They need help with organization and structure.

Helpful Techniques for Visual-Spatial Learners

1. Teach to the student's strengths. Help students learn to use these strengths to compensate for weaknesses. Imagination, creativity, visualization and pattern finding are major strengths.
2. Present ideas visually on the chalkboard or on overheads. Use videos, posters, charts, graphs, computer software, and diagrams. Use manipulatives liberally.
3. Let them observe others before attempting new tasks. Show examples of the finished product requested.
4. Present an overview of the subject being taught. Use metaphors and analogies to give a sense of the whole.

5. Use a sight approach to reading rather than phonics. Supplement with word patterns, roots and affixes, decoding as puzzle solving.
6. Use books rich in visual imagery to enhance interest and ability in reading. (Be aware that some visual-spatial learners may need initial help in learning to visualize.)
7. Employ a computer for both instruction and student writing assignments. Teach keyboarding as soon as possible.
8. Avoid timed tests. Give power tests, which will better reveal mastery.
9. If a bright student struggles with easy, sequential tasks, experiment with more advanced, complex work. Acceleration is more beneficial for these students than remediation.
10. Teach the student to visualize spelling words, math facts, etc. They will remember what they see (in the mind's eye also) and may forget what they hear.
11. Give more weight to contents of papers than to format. Teach mechanics apart from response to content.
12. Have them discover their own methods of problem solving instead of teaching step by step. For instance, give them some division problems with the answers and allow them to figure out how the answers were arrived at. Then have them see if this method works with new problems.
13. Avoid drill, repetition and rote memorization; use more conceptual approaches and fewer, more difficult problems.
14. Be emotionally supportive. These learners are keenly aware of their teachers' reactions to them. Success is related to perceptions of teachers' empathy.
15. Allow time for formations of answers and word retrieval. Support well thought out answers above fast ones.
16. Emphasize creativity, imagination, new insights, new approaches rather than just acquisition of knowledge. Creativity should be encouraged in all subject areas.
17. Group visual-spatial learners together for instruction.
18. Engage students in independent studies or group projects that involve problem finding (and problem clarification) as well as problem solving.
19. Allow them to construct, draw or otherwise create visual representations of concepts.
20. Silent reading may be better than oral reading. Ask comprehension questions and allow them to find answers through reading silently at least part of the time.
21. Teach them to retrieve material in their visual memory banks by looking up.
22. They will do better when allowed to display what they know, rather than being put on the spot, as with flash cards (you're right or wrong each time.) Spread the cards out and allow them to pick out what they know.
23. Memorization of facts is a weakness. Use visualization and mnemonics as aids.
24. Humor and playfulness actually increase learning; use liberally (but no sarcasm).
25. Play "What's My Rule?" These pattern finders are good at discovering rules and principles.