

ALL ABOUT TIME*

(excerpts from *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner*)

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Awareness of time vs. space

Time is the quintessential attribute of the left brain. All of the functions of this hemisphere proceed temporally. (Shlain, 1998, p. 220)



Weaknesses: a disregard of time (clock, calendar and timetable time) which is, of course, exasperating for schools, though perhaps it may also have a plus side in that there can be an appreciation of history and the future on a large scale—as a whole. The point being that time (everyday clock time) is one-dimensional so, like reading and writing, can be difficult for the 3-dimensional thinker to come to terms with. (Sue Parkinson, Director, Arts Dyslexia Trust, London, 1997)

The auditory-sequential thinker is profoundly influenced by time and is less aware of space; the spatial thinker is preoccupied with space at the expense of time. Time is important in school—being on time, taking timed tests, turning in work on time, finishing activities in a timely fashion, and moving on to new activities in a set schedule. This time-based managerial system is comfortable for auditory-sequential learners. But all of this seems quite foreign to VSLs. They often lack any concept of time. They may be late for school, behind in their work, or reluctant to move on from one activity to another.

They freak out during timed tests. Time seems to be their worst enemy.

My 8-year-old son fit your visual-spatial profile. He remembers **where** he was when something happened, but has no concept of **when** it happened (if he remembers at all!) This is almost funny. He has no idea whether something happened weeks or years ago, but can tell you where everyone was seated at the time.

At home, the threat of being timed creates more dread than the threat of being grounded.



No concept of the passage of time: T can spend 20 minutes tying a shoe, or chew a mouthful of food, very slowly, 50 or 60 times. He can hurry, if it's to do something with a friend, but this is extremely rare.



Both of my children really require time to delve deeply into a subject. The typical school day, with interruptions every 45 minutes, annoys them. They need time to ponder, to consider, to think, to visualize, to experience. By the time they settle into a subject and begin to explore, the traditional school structure demands that they disengage.



My sense of time is atrocious. ... I can be really slow at the initial picking up and processing of information (particularly if I am expected to communicate at the same time), but when it's in, it's in.

On the other hand, VSLs have extraordinary awareness of where they are in space, or how the elements of design fit together in space. They are natural artists and map-makers, love puzzles and mazes, build with anything available, see the underlying structure of things, understand perspective, and recognize visual patterns. It is important to value these spatial skills as much as temporal ones, and to provide opportunities for their development in the classroom.

The right hemisphere integrates feelings, recognizes images, and appreciates music. It contributes a field awareness to consciousness, synthesizing multiple converging determinants so that the mind can grasp the senses' input *all-at-once*. (Shlain, 1998, p. 18)

Another strength of many auditory-sequential learners is timing. Children with good audition and auditory processing have a good sense of timing and of time. They are punctual, they manage their time effectively so that they can get their assignments turned in when they are due, they are able to work within time constraints, and they often know when to say things (and when not to).

An appreciation of linear time was the crucial precondition for linear speech. A conversation can be understood only when one person speaks at a time. In contrast, one's right brain can listen to the sounds of a seventy-piece orchestra and hear them holistically. (Shlain, 1998, pp. 22-23)

Obviously, the two hemispheres need input from each other and the ability to collaborate in order for us to do most mental functions. We need to apply this same rule of complementarity in the world at large. Leonard Shlain suggests that humanity has had an unhealthy domination of left hemispheric values for the last 5,000 years, which has left in its wake the subjugation of the feminine to the masculine. But he sees us moving toward greater appreciation of right hemispheric values, greater collaboration between our right and left hemispheres, egalitarianism, and celebration of the wonderful diversity in the world.

I am convinced we are entering a new Golden Age—one in which the right-hemispheric values of tolerance, caring, and respect for nature will begin to ameliorate the conditions that have prevailed for the too-long period during which left-hemispheric values were dominant. Images, of any kind, are the balm bringing about this worldwide healing. It will take more time for change to permeate and alter world cultures but there can be no doubt that the wondrous permutations of photography and electromagnetism are transforming the world both physically and psychically. The shift to right-hemispheric values through the perception of images can be expected to increase the sum total awareness of beauty. (Shlain, 1998, p. 432)

From Silverman, L. K. (2002). *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner*. Denver: DeLeon. (Contact us for specific page numbers in the book if you plan to quote this material.)