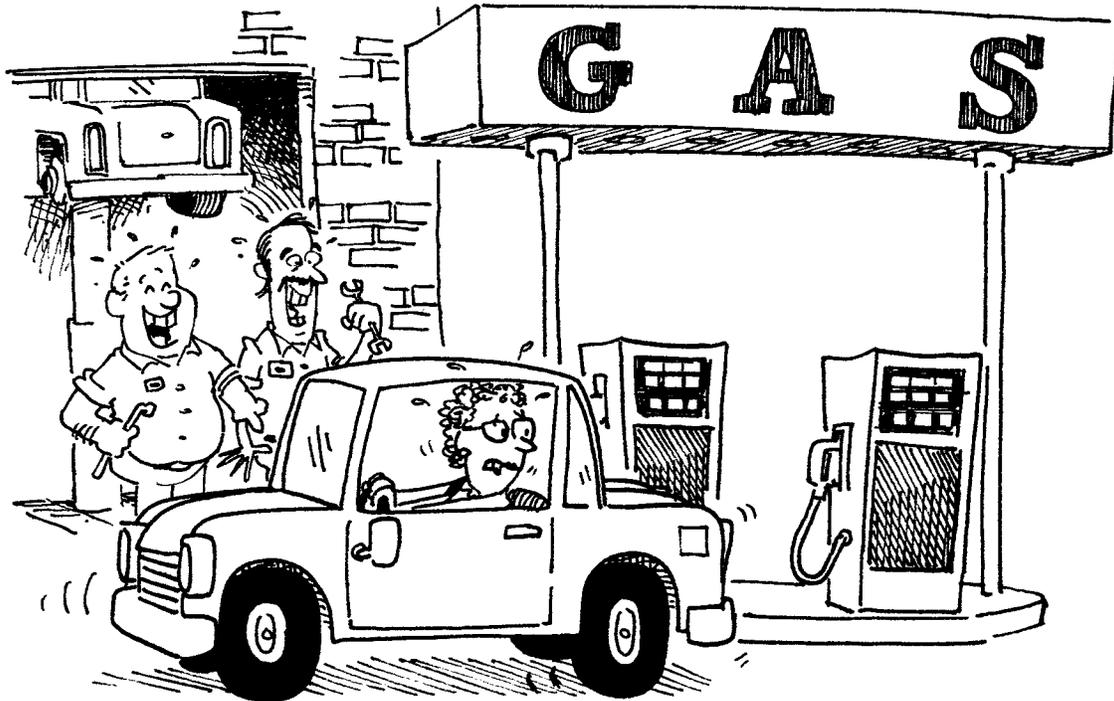


Confessions of a Non-Visual-Spatial Learner

Linda Kreger Silverman, Ph.D.



It's a curious phenomenon that whatever you can do easily, you think must be just as easy for other people. So you fail to appreciate your own gifts. For you visual-spatials, this essay clearly demonstrates that not everybody thinks like you. Me, for instance.

Once, when I was running late for work (this could be ANY day I worked...), I noticed that I was too low on gas to make it. So I stopped at the Amoco Station at the corner, drove up to the right side of the pump, got out of the car, noticed that the gas tank was on the other side, got back in the car, drove around to the other side of the pump, got out of the car, noticed that the gas tank was on the other side, got back in the car, drove around to the other side of the pump again, got out of the car, noticed that the gas tank was on the other side, saw the guys inside the gas station falling off their chairs, got back in the car, and drove 30 miles on an empty gas tank because I was too embarrassed to get the gas. I am not a visual-spatial learner.

There's more. I like shoulder pads. They make me look less pear-shaped. I have a red silk blouse that has been hanging in my closet for at least 8 or 9 years that needed shoulder pads. I finally found the perfect shoulder pads, but I was nervous about my ability to sew them in properly. I decided to sew snaps in the shoulder pads so that they would be removable when I sent the blouse to the cleaners. Cleaners are to shoulder pads what dryers are to socks. I trusted my ability to sew the snaps into the lining of the blouse, but I didn't trust that I could sew the matching part into the shoulder pad without messing it up. I mustered up all my courage, and basted the snaps on the shoulder pad, carefully measuring their alignment with their partners. Basting allowed me to move them easily when I misjudged (which I did twice). Finally, I succeeded and was extremely proud of myself. "I did it!" I announced excitedly. Then I wore the blouse and was miserable all day. I hated the shoulder pads. They looked strange in my shoulders. And they were itchy. I complained that I would have to buy new ones and try again. I took the blouse off and only then noticed that I had managed to sew the pads in upside-down, with the Velcro rubbing against my shoulders instead of facing the seam. (I know what you're thinking. You are not only perplexed that any intelligent person could be this stupid; you are also wondering why I didn't just sew a piece of Velcro into the blouse. It never occurred to me.)

OK, you need more evidence? Dr. Camilla Benbow is one of the spatial geniuses of our time. She has written dozens of research articles about spatial abilities. Camilla invited me to teach a short-course at her university on Counseling the Gifted. The course was 5 days long. Every day, Camilla would drop me off at exactly the same spot on campus, tell me exactly how to get to the room, and every day I would get totally lost. Camilla said she never saw anyone like me.

I have been invited to speak locally on numerous occasions, and I invariably have anxiety attacks. It's not that I'm afraid of speaking. I'm a real ham. But I'm certain I'll get lost trying to get there. It doesn't matter how easy the directions are, or how many times I've been there before, for me each time is just like the first. "You can't miss it!" is the kiss of death. I once went to a speaking engagement 45 minutes from my house, and, knowing my propensity for getting lost, allowed myself an extra hour. Deb Hutchinson drew me a map. I read the map upside-down. They nearly came after me

with a search party. I finally found my way there 2 hours later. I've given up local presentations.

I travel a great deal in my work and stay in lots of hotel rooms. No matter how many times I leave my hotel room, I invariably turn in the direction opposite of the elevator. You can bank on it. I have to laugh when some unsuspecting host or hostess who invites me to speak asks me if I'd like to rent a car when I get off the plane. I always respond, "Would you like to see me again?" I have to be taken to the Ladies' Room like a 5 year old, because if I have to turn any corners, I won't be able to find my way back. I tell my audiences that I should be wearing a handicap sign: "Don't follow me. I'm lost."

Now, you want to hear something really funny? I have just published a book about visual-spatial learners. Isn't that a riot?! How could someone with so little spatial intelligence have possibly written a book on the topic! It's probably because I have so little spatial ability that I have so much admiration for people who see in a way that I can't. The book also addresses introversion, because visual-spatial learners tend to be introverted. I'm a rabid extravert. I had to look at this learning style from the outside in, as I definitely had no personal experience to look at it from the inside out.

I have another story about my incredible non-visual-spatial abilities in the Introduction of the book.

Let me tell you just how non-visual-spatial I really am. Last summer I went into a grocery store in Gravenhurst, Ontario, and saw a box that contained what looked like the perfect chair for me to use to work on this book while I was visiting my husband's family. My husband, Hilton, had created a makeshift desk for me at the cottage by placing a loose closet door on top of a dresser, securing it with a cinder block. I needed a chair that would adjust to sufficient height for me to reach the top of the dresser. I noticed that the box with the chair had been opened and taped shut, so I thought it would be a simple matter for Customer Service to reopen it for me. I asked the woman at Customer Service to please bring a pair of scissors and follow me. When we reached the box, I told her that I wanted to see if the chair would raise to the proper height for me. She looked at me, looked at

the box, looked at me again, completely puzzled, and said, "But, Ma'am, this chair is unassembled." It took me until I went to sleep that night to realize the utter stupidity of my question. Did I really think she could open a flat box and out would pop a three-dimensional chair that I could sit on and adjust the height? (Well, actually, yes!)

So now you know that everyone cannot picture things in their heads the way you do. My book is loaded with anecdotes from visual-spatial learners that were sent to our website. Here's one of them:

My husband is an electronic engineer. He read your list and said he was definitely a visual-spatial learner. (In fact, he was quite astounded that anyone would think in "words." I believe "Whoa, that's weird" was his exact comment.)

You've read all those "You know your kid is gifted when..."
How about sending me some, "**You know you're visual-spatial when...**"
And how about some: "**You know your kid is visual-spatial when...**"
Or how about some: "**You know you aren't visual-spatial when...**"

Oh, if you're wondering about my book, it's called *Upside-Down Brilliance: The Visual-Spatial Learner* now available through the Gifted Development Center online catalog at www.gifteddevelopment.com.

Fondly,
The Queen of Non-Visual-Spatials