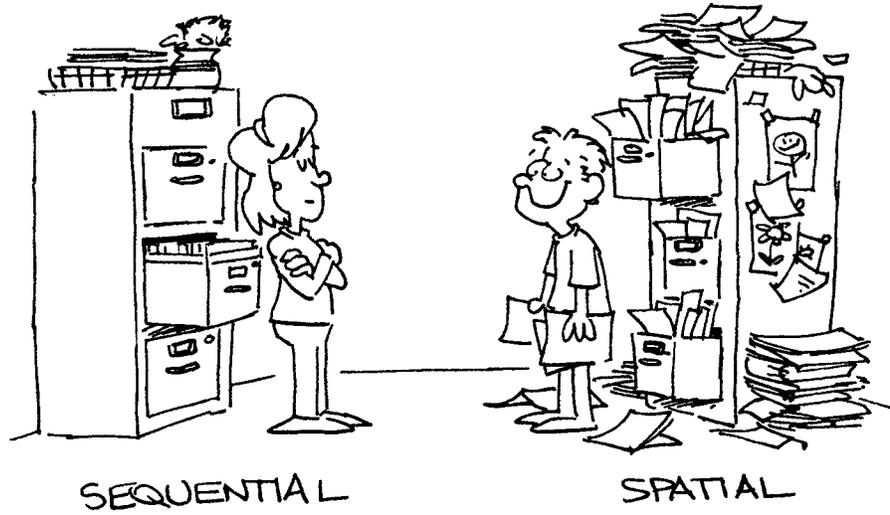


Organizational Skills for Visual-Spatial Kids Like You!

Alexandra “Allie” Golon

Most, if not all, visual-spatial learners are accused of being hopelessly unorganized. But it has been my experience that many VSLs can find a needle in a haystack. My son, Matt, for example, never ceases to amaze me in his ability to locate just the perfect LEGO™ piece he was searching for even though his room may look as though a tornado has hit it.



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It is important to note in the illustration above that, as long as each person is able to find exactly what he or she needs, in a reasonable amount of time, then neither one's organization is better than the other's. This is an area where, "to each his own," is the rule. If you organize like the person on the right and someone forced you to "organize" the way the person on the left has done, you would likely never find another document again. Your new system of organization would be completely foreign to you and you would not be able to imagine, or *see*, where your belongings were.

However, if you find that you are losing important paperwork (like homework!), or toys or money, you need to develop a better system. The new method must be your own, though. It simply will not work to get organized under somebody else's (like a parent's) system. If your mom thinks green folders are what you should use for all your science work, but green is meaningless to you for remembering science, then you can't use that system. It won't work. You have to create your own strategies—ones that you can remember. Here's how to get started:

Visit office supply stores and other places that carry products designed to help with organization. Color-coded envelopes, files and pocket folders are perfect for storing specific papers. Colored index cards are great tools for note taking. A Day-Timer or Palm Pilot to record your due dates and appointments is a great way to remember when your assignments must be done. There's a reason why so many organizational products have

come on the market in recent years. They must be the inventions of visual-spatials to help themselves and others who think and learn like they do.

Linda Leviton is a visual-spatial learner and a member of the Visual-Spatial Resource Access team. I asked her how she helps VSL kids get organized. Here's what she wrote:

VSLs are either horizontal or vertical organizers...if they are horizontal, they need a long table (preferably not deep) to put out (and leave out) works in process. If they are vertical, they need places to create stacks. I bought myself one of those paper sorters with cubbies and have it right next to my computer (with labels for each section) and that's how I do it. (L. Leviton, personal communication, May 31, 2004)

When we homeschooled, each of my kids used a Teacher's Planner to record their daily assignments. In fact, sometimes homework from different subjects was recorded in different colors. There are lots of varieties of planners available, including ones that show a week-at-a-glance or a month-at-a-glance. You can find them at local teachers' supply stores. Choose one that gives you plenty of room to write or draw your notes, especially due dates, assignment details and appointments.

Linda Leviton also advised:

As for schoolwork, I have one word for you...pockets. Forget binders and putting holes in things. They need something they can shove papers into, and if you color code the pockets you have a better chance of the right paper getting into the right pocket. My preference is a folder with each class having its own colored pockets (one in front and one on back)...front is for current work or something to be turned in, back is for reference or past work. Just don't expect them to punch holes or get papers in sections that involve opening or closing anything; stuffing is what they do best! (L. Leviton, personal communication, May 31, 2004)

Matt's personal method for making sure that he remembers to take his homework folder, lunchbox and water bottle to school every day is to pile them all up at his place on the kitchen table. Then, when he finishes breakfast, he takes it all to the car. The few times he has left some of those items somewhere other than the kitchen table, they didn't make it to school.

A large calendar for recording each family member's schedule is helpful. Use it to write down everyone's appointments from sports practices to work schedules, field trip days to long-term assignments, holidays and other days off. I've found that having my kids write a due date for assignments three to four days before the actual due date has helped avoid last minute all-nighters. The extra built-in time allows time for editing, revisions, etc, and a more relaxed approach to the deadline. Having a master calendar also allows you to see how long until Christmas, the last day of school, your birthday or other events you are anticipating.

Use the computer to get organized! There are a number of programs that include calendars and ways to notify you of your due dates. You can create files of notes about certain assignments and store them on your computer. You will likely be using a personal

computer all the rest of your life. Start using software products now to help you organize your schoolwork and home life.

There are certain traps for visual-spatial kids that you should be aware of now. The traps are the computer and the television. Because the computer and TV use visual images, the right hemisphere is highly attracted to these entertainment boxes. Try to set aside a specific time during the day or week for computer and television use. If this is built into your schedule, it'll be easier to understand why mom is enforcing that your homework be done at a certain time and not allowing you to procrastinate or be distracted by the TV or computer. We use a timer in our house so there's no argument about what time the computer game or TV show started. The timer is not arbitrary. The bell rings, the turn is over.

"A place for everything and everything in its place"—not an easy trick for visual-spatial kids, but one that will last you a lifetime. I seldom misplace my car keys because they go in the exact same place every time I come home. We have a small bookshelf set aside just for library books so when the due date comes, we're not scrambling to find them. Inexpensive containers, even shoeboxes and cleaned out plastic food tubs, make great sorting containers for small toys. We have an entire closet just for construction toys. In our home, we have only two rules about bedrooms: No food (yuck!) and there must always be a clear path from the door to the bed—I really hate stepping on LEGOs with bare feet!

Being prepared in advance is critical. Pack your backpack and lunchbox the night before. Sometimes, we even load the car up the night before so there's less hassle in the morning. Try to select your clothing for the next day before you go to bed.

With a bit of practice and trial-and-error to see what works and what doesn't, you can probably get yourself organized and stay that way!

Alexandra "Allie" Golon is Former Director of the Visual-Spatial Resource, a subsidiary of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Development, in Denver, Colorado. As a founding member of the Visual-Spatial Resource Access Team, a former G/T teacher and homeschooling parent to two exceptionally gifted visual-spatial learners, Allie brings a wealth of experience to her books, *Raising Topsy-Turvy Kids: Successfully Parenting Your Visual-Spatial Child* and, *If You Could See the Way I Think: A Handbook for Visual-Spatial Kids* which has also been used by teachers as a rich source for classroom strategies. Allie has been invited to present on parenting and teaching visual-spatial learners and on homeschooling issues at state, national and international venues. She has counseled dozens of families regarding harmoniously parenting visual-spatial learners as well as on various homeschooling issues, and has appeared on talk radio programs and in various print media. Allie can be reached at Allie@Visual-Learners.com.

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