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Child > Learning & Education

# The visual learner

By [Jhoanna Robledo](#)

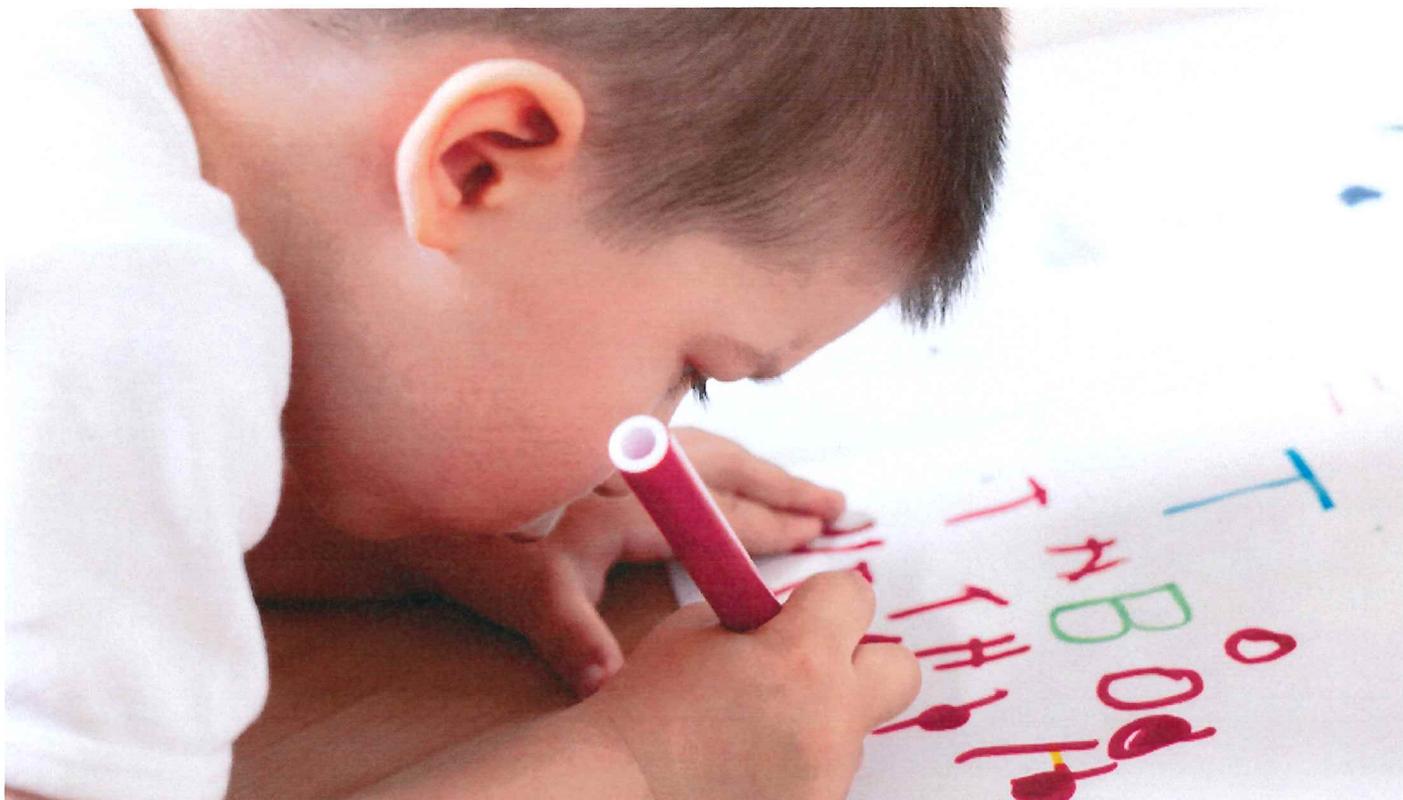


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## IN THIS ARTICLE

- [What is a visual learner? ↓](#)
- [What are the benefits of knowing my child's learning style? ↓](#)
- [What can I do to help my visual child excel in preschool and kindergarten? ↓](#)
- [How can I address my visual child's weaknesses in other areas? ↓](#)

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If you peek into a classroom, it's easy to spot a visual learner. He's the one sitting in the reading nook leafing through a book, or the one who's playing with a puzzle or shapes and letters. If your child is a visual learner, you've probably noticed that he has keen powers of observation: He watches your lips move as you speak or pays close attention to what you do when you're demonstrating something. That's because visual learners rely primarily on their sense of sight to take in information, understand it, and remember it. If they don't "see" it, they're not able to fully comprehend it.

Educators have identified two kinds of visual learners: picture learners and print learners. Many children are a mixture of both, although some are decidedly one or the other, according to Mariaemma Willis and Victoria Hodson, authors of *Discover Your Child's Learning Style*. Picture learners think in images; if you ask one whether an elephant is gray, he'll probably summon up the image of an elephant that he's seen at the zoo or in a photograph. Print learners think in words; they quickly learn to read and easily can memorize the correct spelling of words. They're also the ones who like to practice writing and forming letters. If you ask a print learner if an elephant is gray, the first thing he'll conjure up is the word "elephant," and then he may try to recall what he's seen in a book about the animal.

## What are the benefits of knowing my child's learning style?

Knowing how your child learns and processes information is a valuable tool you can use to help him do better in school and develop a love of learning. Education experts have identified three main types of learning: physical, visual, and auditory. When learning a new math concept, for example, a visual learner will grasp the material more quickly by watching his teacher solve a problem on the blackboard or seeing himself solve the problem with concrete materials. An auditory learner will understand the concept if he can listen to the teacher explain it and answer his questions. A physical learner (also called tactual-kinesthetic) may need to use blocks, an abacus, or other counting materials to practice the new concept.

If you understand that your child is a visual learner (though his style may shift over time), and therefore most comfortable using sight to explore the world, you can play to

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learning style can significantly increase his performance at school. (Many of these studies were based on a specific learning styles program developed by Rita Dunn, director of the Center for the Study of Learning and Teaching Styles at St. John's University in New York City.) The evidence is compelling: Two elementary schools in North Carolina were able to increase the achievement-test scores of students from the 30th percentile up to the 83rd percentile over a three-year period. And in 1992, the U.S. Department of Education found that attending to a child's learning style was one of the few strategies that improved the scores of special-education students on national tests.

## What can I do to help my visual child excel in preschool and kindergarten?

The best way to support your visual child is to indulge his interests and provide him with the materials he needs to learn. "Pay attention to what your child likes, and try to approach learning from that point," says Kurt Fischer, director of Mind, Brain, and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. If your child likes games, for example, card games can hone his memory and concentration skills. Have lots of books available, too, so he can look at the pictures or make an attempt to read the words. "One of the best predictors for school success is the number of books kids have access to at home and how much time their parents spend reading with them," says Fischer. And though it isn't recommended for all children, visual learners may benefit from educational television because watching helps them learn.

Whatever you do, make sure the activities are developmentally appropriate. Preschoolers and kindergartners are trying to nail down fundamentals such as the alphabet and counting. The more advanced ones are already starting to read and may have begun to understand the basics of addition and subtraction. So if your child responds to pictures better than words, find books that have lots of interesting images accompanying text to encourage reading. Spend lots of time going over the alphabet if your child likes letters and words. Approach math and other subjects the same way, using illustrations and graphs if your child responds to images more readily, and the numbers themselves if your child likes printed information. For more activities your visual child may enjoy, see the articles listed below.

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## How can I address my visual child's weaknesses in other areas?

First, remember that your child's learning style isn't necessarily a liability. If his strengths do not lie with the physical or auditory, he's not necessarily doomed to have problems in school. Learning styles aren't set in stone, and your child will shift from one style to another as he gets older and develops other skills. "Learning is complex," says Barbara Given, director of the Adolescent Learning Research Center at the Krasnow Institute for Advanced Study at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. "Finding out your child's learning style is just the tip of the iceberg. What matters more is what you do with this knowledge."

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opportunities to participate in hands-on activities to stimulate physical learning, and encourage him listen to music to strengthen his auditory skills.

You can also show him how to compensate for his lack of strength where listening and physical skills are required. He may not absorb much of what the teacher is saying, for example, if it's circle time and the teacher isn't using anything visual to help explain a topic. If this happens often, tell him to sit close to the teacher so he can watch her face as she speaks. As much as possible, accompany verbal directions with visual cues – for example, pointing where you want him to go while saying, "Turn left, then right."

In the end, what matters most is that you nurture and support your child's learning, no matter what his style. Follow his lead and focus not on how great he's becoming at certain subjects but how great he is in general. "Good parenting counts most," says Given. "It's essential for learning and discovery."

## Where can I get more information about learning styles?

See the following articles:

[The auditory learner](#)

[The physical learner](#)

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### The auditory learner (grades 1 to 3)

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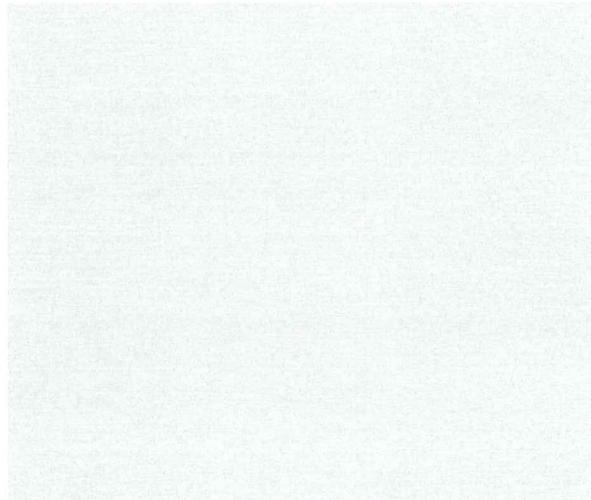
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