Are you wishing you were more of a visual versus verbal learner or the other way around? Chances are, if you're wondering if learning styles can be changed, it's because you are taking a class or classes that use one format for teaching that isn't working for you. For those wondering how versatile learning styles are, consider one researcher's statement that, it is critical for all students and individuals to have a firm "awareness of one's own learning styles for different disciplines or subjects so that such styles may hopefully be changed to suit changing learning situations" (Fatt 2000).

Hypothetically, at least according to researchers who used brain imaging techniques to monitor response to visual learning materials, there is an opportunity for changes in learning preferences when a learning situation requires it repeatedly. The authors of the study provide an example to highlight their findings, stating, "a student who prefers the verbal style may be able to learn to visualize in certain situations where it would be helpful for a specific subject, such as organic chemistry" (Kraemer, 2009).

Versatility and adaptability is an important component of adjusting one's own learning style with the subject matter or nature of the material, but it should be emphasized that this responsibility for adapting a learning style—something that is firmly ingrained, especially in older students or those who are receiving on-the-job-instruction—should not lie with the learner alone. It is critical that all teachers, instructors, or managers understand the finer points of individual learning styles and learning preferences so that they can spot potential problems in their teaching methods and find ways to include all students in the content. This is a burden for some instructors, especially those in the corporate world, but without shouldering this task it is possible to leave an entire subset of the class behind without intentionally doing so.

One study used a common tool implemented for visual learning styles—the concept map. A concept map presents information in a visual context to assist in retention of material and presumably, to aid in creative brainstorming on a particular concept or topic. The study was

used in a medical school context and took into account all learning styles in the class using the Felder-Silverman measurement of learning styles. While there were several students with visual learning styles, they were not a clear majority. Still, it was shown that using concept maps, which are something that are most often associated with those instructors hoping to work with visual learners, were effective among all of the different learning styles in the class. The author concluded that concept maps could “potentially assist motivation, engagement and deep learning in medical and biomedical science education when used as a supplement to more traditional teaching/learning activities” (Laight 2004). In other words, while instructors may wish to use learning style specific teaching methods, providing a blend of materials for different learning styles might not exclude students but rather could serve to complement existing instructional materials.

Learning styles have also been defined as involving “the tendency to adopt a particular strategy in learning. Most students have a preferred learning style but some adapt their learning style according to the tasks” (Fatt, 2000) which means they are “versatile” in their learning style. While this may not mean you’re going to will yourself into becoming a visual learner, with the right tactics, you can manipulate learning styles if not preferences.