

How can a visual learner succeed in a difficult class that is entirely based on lectures delivered without any visual materials or aids? It should be emphasized that the visual learning style is merely a preference, it's not that you cannot learn this way, but you do tend to do better when material is presented visually. Since you likely have no control over how the instructor chooses to deliver the course content, you have to make the best of the situation and create visual material where none exists, preferably during (not after) the lecture itself. The following are a few tips to help visual learners get the most out of lectures.

The Lecture as a “Performance”

Although it might not seem like it could make a difference, simply watching your instructor closely as he or she delivers the lecture can be incredibly beneficial to your comprehension and retention of the material. You should also spend time looking down and taking notes, of course, but make it a point to SEE what your instructor is saying by paying attention to body language. If you can learn how to view a lecture as a “performance” of sorts and try to associate certain movements and appearances, facial expressions, and general postures with important points, you'd be amazed at how much more you'll get out of a lecture. Remember, you don't do as well just passively listening—you need to see, so watch!

Front and Center

In order to get the most out of the “performance” of the lecture, you are going to need to make sure that wherever you sit, you have front row seats to the show. If you are going to use the lecture performance technique to change the way you view lectures, make sure that you move to the very front so that you can see everything going on with your instructor. You need to be close enough so that you can catch the subtle changes of expression on your instructor’s face as he or she communicates. You need to be close to the action—close enough that you can begin to associate certain body movements and forms of body language to points of emphasis. This will help you get more engaged on a visual level with the instructor’s words and will also help you create cues in your mind that relate to the information.

Performance Notes

One of the hard and fast rules about the visual learning style is that taking notes is important but by themselves they’re not good enough—you need to add color and your own graphics wherever possible. Hopefully, since you likely already know that highlighting and adding color to your notes helps you absorb information, you do this sort of thing already. Chances are, however, that this is something you do after the session has ended—you add highlighting and color while studying. That is a great habit for a visual learner in a lecture based class, but amp this technique up. Use the “performance” of your instructor to use color to emphasize the same words he or she emphasizes through body language. Say, for instance, your teacher’s arms fly up a little each time he says an important word that you should know the definition for—make that color-coded red to indicate “heat” or an idea of vigor WHILE you are in the class so you can associate this with an important point or something your instructor thought was loaded with meaning or in need of emphasis.

In short, try to find a way to get visually engaged with the lecturer so you don’t fall victim to the

passive listening habit that so many other visual learners do. If you can make it a point to truly SEE what is being said by paying attention to body language and making notes that are colored to correspond to what this body language is trying to emphasize, you'll find that you have a richer lecture experience and hopefully, better retention of the material. Try it for your next lecture and let us know what happens.