

Before you get started with this article, you might want to first check out another one for students with the visual learning style that discusses [how to thrive in a lecture format](#) when all there is to cling to are spoken words from your instructor. It provides a broader set of techniques to practice for visual learning in a lecture-based class whereas this article will go on to help you better understand how you, as a visual learner, are most likely going to process the spoken word.

One of the most important things to realize about yourself as a visual learner is that you do not interpret and utilize language the same way an auditory learner might. Whereas some students have learning styles that are most aligned with simply listening to the sounds of the language and interpreting direct language-related information from the instructor, those with a visual learning style have a different approach. Instead of simply hearing words and having the words themselves become the symbols of meaning, visual learners instantly and unconsciously translate sets of words with strings of images and thoughts. For those with a visual learning style, the words themselves string themselves into a narrative that is more like a filmstrip or movie rather than a word-based story or plot.

If you know that you are a visual learner already, chances are very good that you are someone who is very inclined to turn auditory and textual input into a movie of sorts. Unfortunately, this way of thinking is not always as encouraged as more traditional ways of thinking that instructors subtly enforce by giving handouts that are based completely on textual input and information. It is therefore up to you to make your own movies; be the director of the course content of your choice—take control of your learning process by breaking that old chain of thought that intense visualization is somehow “daydreaming” in class; if you’re focused on the course content, then it certainly isn’t.

When directors and other visual artists who want to tell a story or communicate a complex thought set forth, one of the first things they do is set up a storyboard. This can be a formal piece of software that they use or something very rough-hewn and organic, such as a comic-strip like drawing that tells the story with icons or pictures to symbolize major figures, events, or ideas. This method of visualization and creation works particularly well with course content that is narrative based like history, literature, and other subjects in the humanities. The next time you're in class, take your notes in storyboard form, adding illustrations as you study later and some while you're in the class. I know, I know, you've been told that this is bad—to draw in class means you're not paying attention. However, you might be surprised at your instructor's reaction if he or she sees what you're working on—especially if that instructor sees improvements in your retention of the material.

Chances are that at some point in your academic career you've been accused of being a dreamer or as being a student who has potential if only you could buckle down and not drift away in class. Without over-generalizing, however, it is probably true that this put you on the defensive because you knew full well that you were paying attention but instead of making the effort of looking engaged, you were thinking about what your instructor was saying very carefully by visualizing the words in great detail. It is a shame that we are told from the time we are children in our earliest school years that drifting off in class is bad and that we're not being good little listeners when so many students really are simply getting that faraway look in their eyes because they are imagining—because it is that imagination that helps them retain information most effectively.