

# [Effect of doodling in learning](https://assignbuster.com/effect-of-doodling-in-learning/)

Doodling: Distracting or Rewarding?

George Evans once said, “ Every student can learn just not on the same day or the same way”. For educators, there are few things more frustrating than looking out to the classroom and seeing children with their heads down appearing uninterested or inattentive. Infinite questions can run through a teacher’s mind as to the setting of their classroom and if they are handling the order in the classroom in a proper manner. However, when ideas and methods are multifaceted, doodling can be a fast and intuitive way for students to capture information. For example, it helps in stimulating the brain, creating conceptual hierarchies, and giving the brain a break from the task of paying active attention for long periods of time. Doodling is just one of many memory strategies for visual learning that can be used to enhance encoding of classroom material in all subject areas.

In order to understand why students feel apt to doodle, it is first important to understand where doodling came from. According to Matthew Battles of American Scholar, there are many ways in which the word ‘ doodle’ arrives in the twenty-first-century terminology. For example, “ The best-known such use occurs in the colonial sobriquet ‘ Yankee Doodle’, which in turn became a catchall British nickname for Americans during the Revolutionary War” (Battles 106). Although there is origination in countries such as Germany and Portugal, each place offers the term ‘ doodling’ to be a negative and unacceptable act. This negative connotation continues into the classroom when teachers are strict with their students about paying attention in class. But what does it mean to pay attention? Battles writes, “ We doodle in solitude, fixing styles as private as the individuated, inner cosmologies of thought betray themselves in the slow smiles or the clouded faces of strangers on the subway” (108).  As students ‘ thoughts betray themselves’, they begin to wander off into a different mental state than offering active listening skills to the teacher. As an educator, it is likely to hold expectations in the classroom such as refraining from side conversations to other classmates, looking at the board and taking notes as the teacher speaks, and to remain seated and still unless otherwise told. However, each student has a different way of learning and attention-span that can affect how these expectations are played out within the walls of the classroom. The M/C Journal acknowledges that,

Doodlers exhibit 29% more memory recall than those who passively listen, frozen in an unequal bond with the speaker/lecturer. Students that doodle retains more information and are likely more productive due to their active listening. They adeptly absorb information while students who stare patiently or daydream falter. (Populating the Ambient Space)

Each student that connects their learning with the small sketches in the margin of their paper can grasp more information since they have not yet withdrawn from the conversation as they are not ‘ passive listeners’ when they become invested in doodling.  Teachers, of course, may want to question whether this act is as beneficial for the brain and memory as some may say.

The biological considerations behind the art of doodling revolve back to the individual student. A study posted by G. Schott explains in detail how the parts of the brain connect to allow learning to continue to take place even if the student’s eyes and ears are not actively paying attention to the teacher. Schott emphasizes that “ Brain activity in this default system seems to be inversely related to activity in another intrinsic network, “ the attention system”, which is activated during goal-directed cognition” (1133). Ultimately, what is at stake here is a student who is drifting into a state of idle will lose any stimulation of the networks that connect to the attention system. Therefore, in doodling, there is still motivation for the brain to continue to work whether it be directly related to the topic of discussion throughout the classroom or not. It is not important what the doodle is, but that there is a doodle. Another important point Schott makes is that doodling has no relation to being bored in the classroom but is a way to avoid boredom (1134). The brain is engaged in something that is unique to each student but is not meant to come across as a form of disrespect to the teacher. A student could be dealing with anxiety, stress, or simply just having a rough day may result to doodling in the sides of the papers as a choice to escape their own conscious thoughts, but what they don’t realize as many don’t, is their subconscious is still at work. At the end of the day, the educators are hopeful to spread knowledge and lessons across to their students, and doodling can ultimately get them there with possible benefits some may have not considered. For example, “ It will likely activate your brain’s ‘ unfocus’ circuits, give your ‘ focus’ circuits a break, and allow you to more creatively and tirelessly solve a problem at hand” (Pillay). This is a relaxing point for not only student’s education but in everyday lives. When the brain is working hard to concentrate on the same topic for any length of time, the ‘ circuits’ can wear down and be less effective than they would be if they were given a break. Concentration and relaxation through art are beneficial in taking a step back and reflecting on the knowledge everyone has already. Additionally, this helps in mapping concepts in the brain for memory recall. A study performed in the International Journal of Art & Design Education provides evidence into how students allowed to doodle in class recalled information more accurately than students who were not given the opportunity. The study was designed to give a group of student’s powers in the classroom. Many times, the teacher feels that in order to maintain order and respect in the classroom they have to result dominating what the student can or can’t do throughout the school day. This dynamic of power takes away the adolescence interest and focuses on the atmosphere of the classroom over the education of the students. In this case, the students who were given permission to doodle if they chose to perform better on a quiz than those who were simply given the paper and instructed not to doodle on it (Tadayon). These students in junior high have represented the power of choice in the classroom. The experimental group shared the benefit of doodling, but also how the option opens the opportunity for students to show interest. In telling the students that they can doodle it places in their mind the idea that it is acceptable to do this, but they do not have to if they are not interested.

Ultimately, the consequence of doodling is the reaction of the teacher. Mary Bell observes that a student who is caught doodling in class is likely to give a call to the parents and explain that this is unacceptable in the classroom. Bell states, “ Tonight her teacher will call her mother and tell her that Mary Ann needs to pay attention in class, sit up straight and stop doodling…This was a sad thing because the doodles were one thing that got me through the boring parts of my school days” (12). This is an example of the power dynamic in the classroom as previously mentioned. A student who may not appear to be actively listening continues to be looked down upon for what appears to be disengagement. However, Bell who acts as the student in the scenario follows up with how doodling has always been a part of her life and continued to be event into adulthood. The significance in continuing to grow with small sketches appeases the ideas that it can be beneficial for more than the classroom. Visual learning introduces more thought-processing about new subjects as students and adults are gathering new information. In connecting a sketch to an idea, the potential to remember the idea is greater which can be a challenge for all ages.

While it is true that doodling is a rewarding aspect of classroom learning, it does not necessarily follow when it comes to the presentation of the lesson by the teacher. In other words, doodling can be effective when the lesson is not being presented in all visuals. A student who is engaged in a small sketch on a piece of paper is not physically looking at the pictures or models that are being presented therefore they are unable to conceptualize that information. Jason Boggs, Jillian Cohen, and Gwen Marchand collaborated on a study of presenting information on how multi-oriented tasks such as trying to recall an image shown to the students when the student’s head was down and doodling. For example, a visual recall task showed that students who were doodling while observing the images remembered less images than the group who was focused solely on the images shown (210). However, by focusing on the visual aspects, the researchers overlook the deeper problem of how many teachers have not embraced the benefits of doodling and allowed this concept in the classroom with boundaries. A possible solution could be to strategize and include doodling in the classroom at appropriate times. Bell offers strategies for teacher’s such as giving the students an opportunity to transfer notes into visual depictions to help connect concepts from words to pictures. Recent studies like these shed new light on how teachers can constructively address doodling in the classroom and encourage picking up a pencil and beginning a sketch over dazing off into a dream about anything else on the student’s mind.

Although doodling may seem of concern to only a small group of students or educators, it should in fact concern anyone who cares about learning. A student in a class room or an adult on an office phone call can become subjects of doodling when it may seem inappropriate. However, as educators learn more about effective teaching styles, one thing they should continue to consider is reconceptualizing the idea of doodling in the classroom. This discovery will have significant applications in maintaining student’s attention in the classroom because at some point they are going to drift off topic, but doodling can keep the brain stimulated to learn. As George Evans once said, “ Every student can learn just not on the same day or the same way”.

## References

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