

Self-assessment and reflection of a visual learner



In this paper, I take the reader through my search and the processes I went through as a visual learner to decide on my choice of instruction, online or traditional. I identify my strengths and highlight how I have used them in this course; uncover my weaknesses, and present strategies on what to adjust to accommodate them. I also analyze the sources of my preconceived notions about online learning, why they came about, how they affected me, how they relate to my learning style, what I have learned from them, and how I plan to move forward using the information gleaned from the analysis.

It is my plan to use the discoveries I made from my self-assessment and reflection as the baseline for a toolkit to guarantee my continued success and improved performance in the online academic world as well as in my personal growth. Self-Assessment and Reflection I have almost three weeks' experience in an online learning environment. These last few weeks flew by, and I feel relief knowing that I made it this far. When I assess my performance, I feel very proud of myself. Quite frankly, I expected worse.

I used this assignment to uncover the reasons behind opposite results obtained through two similar modes of instruction supporting visual learners. I also determined if my learning style was a factor in this successful three-week period and if so, in what ways. The Search As a visual learner, I naturally wanted to learn in a real classroom so I could see my instructors and classmates face to face. I believed that my motivation depended on physical presence so, in my initial search for schools, I stayed away from the online choices.

However, the schools that offered the programs that interested me either only offered them online or in a blended format. Virtual learning seemed like the trend, but I wanted to be part of it only if it matched my needs and goals. A study used to determine the types of learning styles drawn to online programs observed that “ The visual and read/write styles seem likely to be suitable for online courses” (Drago & Wagner, 2004, para. 12). Reading this made me wonder why, as a visual learner, I was not attracted to an online school.

A partial answer to this states, “ When evaluating our own beliefs, we tend to seek out information that confirms our beliefs and ignore contrary information, even when we encounter it repeatedly” (Riener & Willingham, 2010, p. 35). This made sense. I was so convinced that online learning is not for me (for reasons I will explain in the following paragraph) that even when I came across online programs that better suited my goals, I persisted searching for traditional schools.

The other part of the answer points to my preference for attending classes in person. I believed that my success as a Master’s student depended on my physical presence in the classroom. Digging deeper brought to mind the time I was enrolled in a program for a Master’s degree in Computer Science. Students had the choice of attending classes broadcast live or watching them on video at a later time. Because of my work schedule, I mostly watched videos. I got bored sitting through two to three hours of lecture each week.

Eventually I dropped from the program but not without feeling the loss of over two years of hard work. I was two courses short of the degree. This experience formed the belief that the traditional classroom setting is most ideal. There was also an inkling of self-doubt as I witnessed work colleagues graduating from “ Satellite University”. Hence my dismissal of all the online program choices I encountered in my search. I eventually started looking into online programs again after running out of traditional school choices.

I made myself see that a little over 20 years after my first attempt to earn a Master’s degree, technology has improved vastly and that I have also acquired new and improved learning skills over the years. In a way, I took a leap of faith. Favorable Results and Impressions I have found that my visual learning style has aided me extensively in the world of virtual instruction. I have had no problems learning by mostly reading. I interpret course material using one of my strengths as a visual learner, which is to picture the scenarios presented in my head. I easily switched to digital highlighting, absorbing facts by categorizing through the use of color codes.

I printed material that I accessed regularly, like the course syllabus, and marked important points with my own note-taking symbols to aid in retention. I filtered discussion posts in the online classroom by using flags and switching my thread view to flagged messages only to prevent me from getting distracted. One thing I appreciate about online learning is that the online community focuses more attention on a person’s contributions regardless of physical appearance.

In the virtual classroom, we are somehow more authentic despite not seeing one another. Self-Assessment Drago and Wagner (2004) state that online students are self-supporting individuals who are able, and choose to produce results by themselves instead of collaborating with others. I see this both as a solid characteristic as well as a potential obstacle. In an online learning environment, knowing how to work alone is advantageous. I produce my assignments with little or no help. However, I need to learn to work more openly and freely with others.

Not only is this important because the university uses Learning Teams as their foundation for successful online learning but also because this is a permanent set-up. Working with faceless people is the biggest adjustment I am making. I enjoy physical human interaction and I do not have that luxury online. I find that the lack of immediate visual feedback often puts me in a state of panic. The faceless set-up will not change. “ Online education is here to stay” (Drago & Wagner, 2004, para. 5), but I can adjust my mindset.

I must look for alternate ways to relate with others; stop looking for visual cues, and remember that I am in an asynchronous learning environment. The next best thing to physical interaction is communicating by telephone or, if possible, video conferencing tools like Skype. In a world that practically operates daily on Instant (IM), text, and Private (PM) Messages, it should be effortless to apply these to my academic life. Feedback will come; I just need to be more patient. Living in a society that has and continues to condition us to instant gratification, it pays to slow down for sanity’s sake.

Another potential obstacle as a visual learner is “ difficulty with spoken directions and may be easily distracted by sounds” (“ What’s Your Learning Style? The Results”, 2012). I proved this to be true. Video tutorials distract more than teach me. It takes me longer to work through the material because I keep pausing playback. I lose concentration from this repeated pausing, my sight and sound senses get over-stimulated, and I get overwhelmed. I cannot avoid the sound distractions; therefore, I must remember to allow myself more time to watch video tutorials and use closed captioning when available.

The question remains why I perform well with online learning but struggled at video learning 20 years ago. I know improved technology and increased learning skills are not the only reasons online learning works for me. Both modes of instruction support the visual learning style, so why are the results so polar? I analyzed each medium of instruction delivery, looking at different factors that could affect my performance, like work area set-up, my age/maturity as a learner, material studied, etc. The answer came in one word: interaction.

As a visual learner, I engage more in exchanges that provide me with feedback at the moment of exchange. A video presentation or tutorial, on the other hand, is one-sided. Although it caters to my visual learning style, it is not effective. All I do in this set-up is process information. There is no back-and-forth exchange or acknowledgment which I thrive on as a visual learner. Interaction was the missing piece. Knowing this now, I understand that my academic success is not dependent on my physical presence in the classroom. Conclusion

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I found that my visual learning style, combined with an effective learning environment, contribute greatly to my ongoing success. Knowing my strengths and weaknesses aids me in relating with others in the classroom. I thrive on interaction, so I must make sure that I identify what I need from my instructors or classmates and proactively seek acknowledgment and support from them. This will allow me to grow and be a better participant in the virtual classroom. I must remember to adjust when needed. When I combine these, it becomes insignificant whether I learn online or in a traditional classroom.