Ways to Use Visuals for Learning

Most college faculty members are read-write oriented. We had to be, to get through graduate school. But, is the world so read-write oriented? Are our students? Not so much. Yet how much of our teaching, class exercises, or tests and evaluations are read-write oriented? Adding visual projects to your class and assignments assists students who are visually oriented and improves everyone’s visual learning skills.

✓ **Visualizing success.** Top athletes know that visualizing themselves succeeding helps actual performance. It works. Ask your students to visualize themselves doing *extremely well* on their course paper or the next test. Prompts might include “what are you doing,” “how do you feel,” “where are you” – urge them to be very specific and detailed. Then, have students sketch what they see in their minds. Try doing this several times and urge them to continue to do it.

✓ **Pictures of concepts.** Start by finding some images that illustrate concepts in a lesson. Show students how images can trigger memories and how our brains use images to link ideas. Move to having students find images that illustrate course concepts or content. Give extra credit for especially good ones.

✓ **“Remembering” Charts.** Charts can be wonderful short-hand tools to help students remember new material. Show students how to create “remembering charts” on their own. After showing them, have students create their own “remembering charts.” (See *Top 10 #20* for more information on “remembering” thinking skills.

✓ **“Understanding” charts.** Moving students up from “remembering”, have students work in small groups to create “understanding” charts – charts that assist a person new to the material in understanding it.
Perhaps ask students to analyze images as if they were text. (See *Top 10 #20* for information on “understanding” thinking skills).

✓ **Analytic diagrams.** Improve student analytic skills by having them identify how key concepts are linked together. After demonstrating how to do this several times on the board or large paper, have students create their own diagram that shows how they think key concepts link together. Consider having students then discuss their diagram with 2 – 3 others, to get different approaches.

✓ **Diagram quizzes.** Instead of read-write quizzes, assign students to create diagrams or charts to illustrate key concepts in the readings or class discussions as a quiz.

✓ **Cartoons for feedback.** Ask student groups to create a cartoon strip that illustrates best how you teach. Tell them to be honest. An option is to have them create a strip showing them studying.

✓ **Evaluating diagrams or charts.** Find diagrams or charts in the reading and show students how you would improve the diagram or chart *for students like them*. Do this several times, taking them through this significant thinking skill, then have them do it. Choose a particularly obtuse chart or diagram and assign students the task of making a new one that makes more sense *to them*.

✓ **Applications visuals.** Another complex thinking skill is applying new learning to one’s life. Do a visual of how some concept in the lesson has affected your life, talk them through the process, then have students create their own on a concept studied previously in class. This will take time and practice, so do this several times!

✓ **Summary-response diagram.** Put a key concept in the center of large pieces of paper. Hand separate sheets to different students and have them summarize what they think the concept means. They then hand the sheet to another student who comments upon their statement, perhaps clarifying something. Continue until 4 student’s comments are on the paper, and then review as a team.

*Note: Most of these student activities work equally well when assigned as homework, as an online assignment, or when done in a physical class.*
Teaching

A series of practical and innovative teaching tips for college faculty

The Top 10...

No. 1 – The All-Important First Day of Class
No. 2 – Ways to Make Your Teaching Life Easier
No. 3 – The Crucial Second and Third Classes
No. 4 – Ways to Show Students that You Respect Them
No. 5 – Promote Effective Student Study Skills
No. 6 – Components of a Well-Planned Class
No. 7 – Observe Your Teaching Tendencies
No. 8 – Ways to Keep Your Students Learning
No. 9 – Ways to Get Feedback on Teaching from Students
No. 10 – Using Short Writing to Assess Learning
No. 11 – Getting More (and Better) Student Questions
No. 12 – Mixing Things up Mid-Semester
No. 13 – Engaging Different Input Preferences
No. 14 – Helping Students Stay the Journey
No. 15 – Ways to End Your Course
No. 16 – Resources for Learning and Teaching
No. 17 – Create a Memorable AND Functional Syllabus
No. 18 – Ways to Build Your Students’ Self-Efficacy
No. 19 – Practical Study Tips to Share with Your Students
No. 20 – Laddering Thinking Skills
No. 21 – Learning Based Ways to End Lessons
No. 22 – Ways and Reasons to be Vulnerable While Teaching
No. 23 – Best Practices in Using Student Groups
No. 24 – Components of a Complete Learning Experience