Give Your Brain More Ways to Learn[1]

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Your brain processes information through two main channels: words (what you read or hear) and images (what you see). When you engage both channels, you create stronger memories and a deeper understanding. This isn't just theory—research shows that combining text with visuals helps you learn faster, remember longer, and apply knowledge to new situations.

When you use multiple formats to learn, you:

- Stay more engaged with the material
- Understand complex concepts more easily
- Remember information longer
- Build a deeper, more flexible understanding that supports transferring what you've learned to new situations

The key insight: **You don't have to settle for one format.** When material isn't clicking, seeking out a video, diagram, or audio explanation isn't a workaround—it's how learning actually works.

Taking Charge of Your Media Choices

Finding resources that work for you isn't extra work—it's part of learning. Instead of waiting for instructors to provide different formats, seek out and create your own. Here's how to take charge.

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[1] Content developed with AI, based on the CAST UDL Guidelines™, scholarly sources, and web resources. Icons courtesy of *Flaticon.com* contributors and others.

1. Seek Out Different Formats

When studying new material, look beyond the textbook. Finding the same information in different formats strengthens your understanding.

Strategies:

- Search for videos, diagrams, or infographics that explain concepts from your readings
- Use your library's resources to find podcasts or documentaries on your topics
- Look for interactive simulations or virtual models, especially for science and math
- When text is confusing, search for a visual explanation before giving up

2. Create Your Own Visuals

Making your own diagrams and visual notes isn't just busywork—it forces you to process information deeply and makes it easier to recall later.

Strategies:

- Draw concept maps showing how ideas connect to each other
- Sketch timelines, flowcharts, or diagrams while reading
- Use graphic organizers to compare and contrast ideas
- Turn your notes into infographics or visual summaries before exams

3. Choose Multimodal Projects

When you have assignment options, consider formats that let you combine words with visuals, audio, or video. This deepens your learning and builds valuable skills.

Strategies:

- Propose creating an infographic, podcast, or video instead of a traditional paper
- Add charts, images, or diagrams to your written work
- Build presentations that balance text with meaningful visuals
- Create study guides that combine written explanations with visual aids

4. Avoid Common Pitfalls

Using multiple media works best when done thoughtfully. Keep these principles in mind to maximize your learning.

Strategies:

- Don't read text while listening to someone talk about the same thing—your brain can't process both at once
- Choose visuals that actually explain something, not just decorations
- Keep visuals and related text close together—don't make your eyes jump around
- Don't overload yourself—quality matters more than quantity

Key Takeaway

You learn best when you actively combine different ways of taking in information. Instead of passively reading or listening, look for opportunities to see concepts visualized, create your own diagrams, and express your understanding through multiple formats, such as infographics, podcasts, or videos. Start small: try adding one visual or auditory element to your study routine this week.

Resources

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