

# Sciphers; Strategies for Improving Visual Learning: A Handbook for the Effective Selection, Design, and Use of Visualized Materials

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# Sciphers; Strategies for Improving Visual Learning: A Handbook for the Effective Selection, Design, and Use of Visualized Materials

## **Abstract**

Reviews of *Sciphers*, Science Writing Educators Group, Sharon Dunwoody, and Joye Patterson; and, *Strategies for Improving Visual Learning: A Handbook for the Effective Selection, Design, and Use of Visualized Materials*, by Francis M. Dwyer.

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# Reviews

***Sciphers*. Science Writing Educators Group, Sharon Dunwoody, Ohio State University, and Joye Patterson, University of Missouri, editors. Published at the School of Journalism, University of Missouri, Columbia, MO 65205. Subscription: \$8 per year.**

*Sciphers*, the quarterly newsletter of the Science Writing Educators Group, is aimed at science writing educators, nationally. It reports workshops, internships and training programs for undergraduates, for science writing teachers themselves, and for general-assignment reporters. Its tone is scholarly, without being stodgy. Some of its reports reflect activities of the Science Writing Educators Group which is affiliated with the Association for Education in Journalism. For example, the summer issue stressed a meeting of the members of the Council for the Advancement of Science Writing and science writing teachers. Its purpose was to develop programs, workshops and materials that would better allow professional writers and academics to work more effectively together in developing students or professionals into science writers. Occasionally, *Sciphers* reports on science writing in other countries.

Regular sections include an annotated bibliography of articles on science communication and of proceedings of symposia on communicating science. "A Science Reporter Speaks" is an interview of science journalists in the United States. It probes them about their jobs and about educating science writers. The first featured William J. Broad of *Science* magazine. "News Notes" is a billboard of workshops, publications and internships available to science writing teachers, or their students. An "Editor's

Column *Journal of Applied Communications*, Vol. 65 [1982], Iss. 1, Art. 8.  
Column examines issues that affect science writing. Dunwoody and Patterson used the summer issue to attack Ronald Reagan's announcement to "do away with virtually all National Science Foundation science education activities."

To subscribe, write Joye Patterson at the School of Journalism, University of Missouri-Columbia. To contribute, send manuscripts to Sharon Dunwoody, School of Journalism, Ohio State University, Columbia, Ohio 43210.

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***Strategies for Improving Visual Learning: A Handbook for the Effective Selection, Design, and Use of Visualized Materials.*** Francis M. Dwyer, State College, Pennsylvania: Learning Services, 1978, 266 pages.

If you're looking for an excellent review and summary of research findings about visuals, the Dwyer book is for you.

Dwyer has looked at visualized instruction as it fits into the complex learning environment, not as an isolated variable. He cites over 650 articles, representing the views of more than 625 researchers. Don't panic, however, for the author has done an outstanding job of organizing, condensing, and relating the many variables associated with visual learning.

There are thirteen sections in the text. Each section is organized into (1) specific learning objectives for the reader, (2) an orientation or overview of the topic, (3) review of pertinent research, (4) a discussion of the key findings, (5) a summary of the main ideas (set out in bold face type), (6) review activities for the reader (sort of a self-test), and (7) recommended readings.

Here are some of the chapter topics:

- potentials and limitations of visualized instruction
- multiple and single channel communication
- a strategy for experimental evaluation
- effect of method of presenting visualized instruction
- color as a variable
- culling as an instructional strategy
- aptitude-by-treatment interaction
- individual differences and visualized instruction.

The book includes a number of well designed figures and tables, a helpful author index and an extensive reference list.

What about overall conclusions? One of the most significant indicates that our present methods of selecting and using visuals are terribly ineffective and wasteful. In many instances, we *don't* use appropriate visuals, our methods of presentation are *inappropriate*, and the final result for the learner is not significantly different from instruction without the visuals. It sounds discouraging.

But something can be done to improve.

So, if you want to take a serious look at your own use of visuals and evaluate what's going on in your communication process, Dwyer offers an excellent place to start. It's not light reading. There is a wealth of information, and you will need time for "mental digestion." For researchers, it is an extremely valuable resource. For communicators, it provides an organized approach to examine what you *should* be doing, to improve your use of visual materials.

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