

Using Learning Styles to Enhance Your Tutoring

Discovering and using learning styles is a key to being a successful tutor. Like everything else about your students, their learning style is uniquely their own, different from anyone else's. *Learning styles are a characteristic and preferred way of learning.* Another way to look at learning styles is to think of it as the conditions under which an individual finds it easiest and most pleasant to learn.

Learning styles are primarily visual, auditory, or kinesthetic (tactile). *Visual learners* prefer to learn by reading or watching. *Auditory learners* like to learn by listening. *Kinesthetic learners* learn by doing, by touching or manipulating objects, or by using their hands.

Although students can learn to adapt to learning styles that are not their preferred ones, most people have difficulty at first when asked to do something that seems unnatural to them. The most successful tutors are those who can present material in a variety of ways using a combination of teaching methods in order to reach the diverse learning styles of their students.

Word Problem

Try to solve this problem. You may use any method you wish then answer the questions at the bottom of this page. Keep a close watch on how you choose to answer this problem. At the end, answer the questions and try to determine what learning style you were using.

A parent and child are standing together on the sidewalk. They both start walking at the same time. Each person begins the first step with the right foot. The child must take three steps for every two steps the parent takes. How many steps must the child take until they both land again on the same (either the right or left) foot?

How many steps did they take and did they finish on the right or left foot?

*Answer—the answer to this problem is 6 steps for both to end on the left foot. (Remember, it is not the answer that's important, it's how your student got to the answer.)

Explain how you figured this out.

Did you use visual, auditory, or kinesthetic skills to solve the problem?

Did you and your partner try to solve the problem using the same strategy?

Learning Style Inventory

If you are still not sure of your student's learning style, try this inventory. Ask your student the following questions and score it at the end. You might also want to take this inventory to help you understand your learning style. If you and your student are not the same learning style, it's important for you to be aware that you will have a tendency to teach to your own learning style.

Directions:

To gain a better understanding of yourself as a learner, you need to evaluate the way you prefer to learn. We all should develop a style which will enhance our learning potential. The following evaluation is a short, quick way of assessing your learning style.

This is not a timed test. Try to do as much as you can by yourself. Answer each question as honestly as you can. There are 24 questions. When you have finished, transfer each number to its proper place on the next page by correlating each item with the corresponding number of points. Then total each of the three columns. You will then see what your best channel(s) of learning is. At that point you will know whether you are a visual, auditory or tactile learner.

Place a check on the appropriate line after each statement.

	Often	Sometimes	Seldom
1. Can remember more about a subject through lecture method with informative explanations and discussions.	_____	_____	_____
2. Prefer information to be written on the chalkboard, with the use of visual aids and assigned readings.	_____	_____	_____
3. Like to write things down or take notes for visual review.	_____	_____	_____
4. Prefer to use posters, models, or actual practice, and some activities in class.	_____	_____	_____
5. Require explanations of diagrams, graphs, or visual directions.	_____	_____	_____
6. Enjoy working with tools or making models.	_____	_____	_____
7. Are skillful with and enjoy developing and making graphs and charts.	_____	_____	_____
8. Can tell if sounds match when presented with pairs of sounds.	_____	_____	_____

9. Remember best by writing things down several times. _____
10. Can understand and follow directions on maps. _____
11. Do better at academic subjects by listening to lectures and tapes. _____
12. Play with coins or keys in pockets. _____
13. Learn to spell better by repeating the words out loud than by writing the word on paper. _____
14. Can better understand a news article by reading about it in the paper than by listening to the radio. _____
15. Chew gum, smoke, or snack during studies. _____
16. Feel the best way to remember is to picture it in your head. _____
17. Learn spelling by "finger spelling" words. _____
18. Would rather listen to a good lecture or speech than read about the same material in a textbook. _____
19. Are good at working and solving jigsaw puzzles and mazes. _____
20. Grip objects in hands during learning period. _____
21. Prefer listening to the news on the radio rather than reading about it in a newspaper. _____
22. Obtain information on an interesting subject by reading relevant materials. _____
23. Feel very comfortable touching others, hugging, handshaking, etc. _____
24. Follow oral directions better than written ones. _____

Scoring Procedure:

Place the point value on the line next to the corresponding item. Add the points to obtain the preference scores under each heading.

Often = 5 points
Sometimes = 3 points
Seldom = 1 point

Visual

No.	Pts.
2	___
3	___
7	___
10	___
14	___
16	___
19	___
22	___

VPS=

Auditory

No.	Pts.
1	___
5	___
8	___
11	___
13	___
18	___
21	___
24	___

APS=

Tactile

No.	Pts.
4	___
6	___
9	___
12	___
15	___
17	___
20	___
23	___

TPS=

VPS = Visual Preference Score
APS = Auditory Preference Score
TPS = Tactile Preference Score

Adapted from Barsch Learning Style Inventory by Jeffrey Barsch, ED.D., & Sensory Modality Checklist by Nancy A. Raynie.

Everyone learns in all three styles; however there is typically one (or possibly two) preferred or stronger style(s). In order to begin to teach more effectively, you need to know what it means to be a visual, auditory or kinesthetic learner. The following are brief descriptions of each learning style.

Visual Learners

- Visual learners learn best by seeing information.
- Visual learners often have poor auditory skills and weak verbal abilities.
- Visual learners often have difficulty blending sounds and discriminating short vowel sounds.
- Visual learners are often poor spellers
- Visual learners easily remember information presented in pictures, charts, or diagrams.
- Visual learners can make "movies in their minds" of information they are reading. Their movies are often vivid and detailed.
- Visual learners often pay close attention to the body language of others (facial expressions, eyes, stance, etc.) Be aware of your body language and use it to emphasize important points you wish to make during class.
- Use videos and overheads as part of your lectures.
- Visual learners may tune out spoken directions.

Auditory Learners

- Auditory learners learn best by hearing information. They can usually remember information more accurately when it has been explained to them orally.
- Auditory learners can remember quite accurately details of information they hear during conversations or lectures. (Don't be annoyed if the student isn't taking notes from your lectures)
- Auditory learners have strong language skills, which include a well-developed vocabulary and an appreciation for words.
- Strong language skills often lead to strong oral communication skills. They are usually talented at giving speeches, oral reports, and articulating their ideas.
- Auditory learners may find learning a foreign language to be relatively easy. They also may have musical talents.
- Auditory learners tend to have poor visual skills, so graphs, maps and charts may present a challenge to the auditory learner. They do best with oral directions and assignments.
- Auditory learners often reverse words, for example: from, for, form and was, saw.
- Auditory learners tend to have poor handwriting and small motor skills.

Kinesthetic or Tactile Learners

- Kinesthetic learners learn best by moving their bodies, activating their large or small muscles as they learn. They are "hands-on learners" or "doers" who actually concentrate better and learn more easily when movement is involved.
- Kinesthetic learners often wiggle, tap their feet or move their legs when they sit. Many were labeled "hyperactive" as children.
- Kinesthetic learners work well with their hands. They may be good at art, sculpting, working with various tools, learning in lab situations or learning by computer.
- Kinesthetic learners need to take notes and highlight important information. They are using their small muscles to remember information.
- Kinesthetic learners need information broken into steps; like a systematic process: step 1, step 2, and step 3. They can remember historical dates, mathematical equations, and scientific information if it is presented in a sequential manner.
- Kinesthetic learners may have difficulty learning abstract symbols like letters and numbers.

Now that you've identified and learned about learning styles, you can incorporate that information into your tutoring. The next section covers suggested aids that address learning styles and tutoring strategies for each learning style.

Suggested Aids that Address Learning Styles

Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic/Tactile
Guided imagery	Tapes/CDs	Having student pace or walk during lessons
Color codes	Film and television	
Study cards	Music	Items to "play with" like koosh ball, play-dough
Photographic pictures	Verbal directions	
Film and television	Rhymes/poems	Having student physically "act out" a lesson
Charts and graphs	Reading aloud	
Maps	Repeating things orally	Role playing
Demonstrations	Rhythmic sounds	Having student trace a word with their finger
Drawings	Having discussions	
	Sounding out words	Having student take notes
	Saying words in syllables	Giving student breaks to get up, stretch, etc.

Tutoring Strategies for Visual Learners

1. Use overhead transparencies
2. Use flash cards for key concepts
3. Allow time for student to write down notes
4. Use as many visuals as possible: pictures, diagrams, charts, etc.
5. Use demonstrations whenever possible
6. Write out all key phrases, words, terms, etc.
7. Create outlines for lessons, leaving blanks for student to complete
8. Encourage student to chart out information using maps, diagrams, etc.
9. Have student copy problems and examples
10. Present lesson objective at the beginning of lesson and summary at the end
11. Provide additional worksheets for later practice and reinforcement
12. Write on blackboard when presenting key concepts, etc.
13. Encourage students to keep a notebook/folder of all written work for each lesson/unit

Tutoring Strategies for Auditory Learners

1. Always present material orally
2. Encourage discussion
3. Use a tape recorder to tape session for student review
4. Have student read aloud
5. Ask for oral response to oral questions
6. Ask student to repeat directions, key concepts, etc.
7. Ask student to summarize main points
8. Try to maintain eye contact
9. Encourage student to think out loud
10. Vary the tone and intensity of your voice
11. Plan sessions that are organized in sequential order
12. Give directions orally with only two or three steps at a time
13. Have taped materials available for reference
14. Encourage student to speak answers aloud before writing

Tutoring Strategies for Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners

1. Have student try out a problem on a chalkboard or lab center
2. Encourage student to make their own flashcards
3. Give demonstrations while allowing student to perform, step by step
4. Plan ways for the student to manipulate the materials
5. Use concrete examples to help the student use the skills gained
6. Involve the student in the planning of the tutoring session
7. Use computer assisted programs, so students can type and move mouse
8. Use association techniques to link new learning with past experiences
9. Allow student to stand, move, etc. during session

Conclusion

By now you have determined your student's learning style, understand the three learning styles, and determined ways to teach your student more effectively. We hope that you will notice improved gains with your student and that their learning experience is enhanced.

If you would like further information about learning styles, including additional inventories, visit the following websites.

www.learningstyles.net

www.howtolearn.com/personal.html

www.emtech.net/learning_styles.html

Unless otherwise noted, all materials adapted from Waubensee Community College Learning Enhancement Center's workshop entitled "Use Learning Styles to Enhance Your Teaching" and Waubensee Community College Adult Literacy Project's workshop entitled "How Students Learn: V.A.K.T."