

Lesson 7: Learning Styles (Preferences)

1/ What is Learning?

Learning is defined in a range of ways. Looking at even a small part of the literature available we find that learning is defined as:

- The acquisition of knowledge.
- Knowledge gained through study.
- The gaining of knowledge of something through study, teaching, instruction or experience.
- A process by which behaviour is changed shaped or controlled.
- A change in behaviour as a result of experience or practice.
- The individual process of constructing understanding based on experience from a wide range of sources.

2/ Deep and Surface Learning

There is a distinction made between what has become known as deep and surface learning (Biggs and Moore, 1993). Deep learning, they say, is most likely to take place when the learner becomes very involved in the task(s) that they are undertaking. Surface learning comes about when the learner undertakes the minimum amount of work possible to meet the requirements of the task. They characterise three types of learners, defined by their attitudes and include a third category – the ‘achieving’ learner. (See *figure 1* below)

Deep learner	Surface learner	Achieving learner
‘I want to learn’	‘I want to have fun’	‘I want top marks’
Real involvement with the topic	Minimal amount of work	Cost-effective use of time
In-depth engagement with topic	Scratches the surface of the topic	Finds out what will help achieve high marks

3/ Learning Styles

Each of us has a particular approach to learning which suits us best. Technically this is referred to as a learning style. There has been a great deal written about learning styles, and there are many definitions to consider. To look briefly at some of them will act as a useful starting point.

A learning style is:

- A particular way in which an individual learns.
- A mode of learning; an individual’s preferred or best manner(s) in which to think, process information and demonstrate learning.
- An individual’s preferred means of acquiring knowledge and skills.
- Habits, strategies, or regular mental behaviours concerning learning, particularly deliberate educational learning that an individual displays.

4/ V.A.K Learners

- Your learning style (preference) started in your childhood. If you are a visual learner, you may have been fascinated by books, pictures, colours, shapes, and animation. If you are an auditory learner, you may have been perceived as a nonstop talker who frequently asked questions, sang, or recited nursery rhymes. If you are a kinaesthetic learner, you very likely were a bundle

of energy and actively explored your surroundings—running, jumping, rolling around, taking things apart, and building things out of whatever objects were available.

- As you matured, entered into the educational system, and were exposed to new learning situations now, understanding your learning style helps you select effective learning strategies that will boost your memory and your ability to recall information.
- In some cases, when a learner does not realise that there are different approaches to learning that might be chosen, or when they might have been encouraged always to work in one particular way, learning might prove difficult. Learning might well have been problematic over a long period. If a preferred style of learning can be recognised and steps taken towards making use of what has been recognised, it is possible that learning might proceed more smoothly and with consequent improved results.

5/ Characteristics of V.A.K Learners

• Visual learners

If you are a visual learner you will prefer to learn by **seeing**. You will have good visual recall and prefer information to be presented visually, in the form of diagrams, graphs and maps for example. Video recordings and television programmes will suit you. Other characteristics can be summarised as follow:

- A visual learner is a reader/observer.
- Scans everything; wants to see things, enjoys visual stimulation.
- Enjoys colours.
- Needs to see the teacher's body language/facial expression to fully understand.
- Not pleased with lectures
- Daydreams; a word, sound or smell causes recall and mental wandering.
- Usually takes detailed notes.

• Auditory learners

If you are an auditory learner you will prefer to learn by **listening, hearing and saying**. You will most likely have good auditory memory and benefit from discussion, lectures, interviewing and audio tapes for example. You will like sequence, repetition and summary. Other characteristics are as follow:

- An auditory learner interprets the underlying meanings of speech through listening to tone of voice, pitch, speed..
- Prefers directions given orally.
- Seldom takes notes or writes things down.
- Often repeats what has just been said; talks to self.

• Kinaesthetic learners

If you are a kinaesthetic learner you will prefer to learn by **touching and doing**. You are probably good at recalling events and you associate feelings or physical experiences with memory. You enjoy physical activity and manipulating objects. As a kinaesthetic learner you will also:

- Benefit from regular breaks in learning activities
- Count on fingers and talks with hands.

- Be good at drawing designs.
- Often doodle while listening, thus processing information faster.
- Be good at sports, mechanics, using appliances and tools.
- Be adventurous and enjoy first-hand experience.
- Find it hard to sit still for long periods.

6/ Make your Learning Style work for you

a/ For Visual Learners:

- Have a clear view of your teachers when they are speaking so you can see their body language and facial expression.
- Use colour to highlight important points in text.
- Illustrate your ideas as a picture and use mind maps.
- Use multi-media such as computers or videos.
- Study in a quiet place away from verbal disturbances.
- Visualize information as a picture to aid learning
- Make charts, graphs and tables in your notes.
- Participate actively in class—this will keep you involved and alert.
- When trying to memorize a material, write it over and over.
- Keep a pencil and paper handy so you can write down good ideas.

b/ For Auditory Learners:

- Think aloud and talk to yourself.
- Participate in class discussions/debates.
- Make speeches and presentations.
- Read texts out loud—especially when proofreading or when tired.
- Create musical jingles and mnemonics to aid memorization.
- Use a tape recorder.
- Discuss your ideas verbally with a friend or small group.
- Use verbal analogies.
- Recite information over and over to better memorize.
- You may want to sit near the side or back of the classroom where there is less visual stimulation.

c/ For Kinaesthetic Learners:

- Take frequent study breaks and vary your activities.
- Make studying more physical—work at a standing desk, chew gum, pace while memorizing, read while on an exercise bike, squeeze a tennis ball...
- Use bright colours to highlight reading materials.
- Transfer reduced information to flash cards.
- Use spatial note taking techniques such as mind mapping.

Task: Discover How You Learn

- To make the most of study time, identify your best learning style. Then take advantage of it.

A. Imagine that a game called ‘Snapball’ has become popular. Look at the phrases below. First, circle your preferred methods for learning the game. Then write A (auditory), V (visual), or K (kinesthetic) on the line next to each item you circled. This should help you identify your strongest learning styles.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> read a book or manual | <input type="checkbox"/> watch videotaped demonstrations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> watch it being played | <input type="checkbox"/> listen to recorded instructions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> try playing it | <input type="checkbox"/> practice many times |
| <input type="checkbox"/> look at diagrams | <input type="checkbox"/> make notes |

B. Put a checkmark in each statement that sounds like something you do. Total your checkmarks at the bottom for each column to identify your primary and secondary learning style. It’s okay to have more than one checkmark per question.

Question	Visual	Auditory	Kinaesthetic
1. If I have to learn how to do something, I learn best when I...	Watch someone show me how.	Hear someone tell me how.	Try to do it myself.
2. When I read, I often find that I...	Visualize what I am reading in my mind’s eye.	Read out loud or hear the words inside my head.	Fidget and try to “feel” the content.
3. When asked to give directions, I...	See the actual places in my mind as I say them or prefer to draw them.	Have no difficulty in giving them verbally.	Have to point or move my body as I give them.
4. If I am unsure how to spell a word, I...	Write it in order to determine if it looks right.	Spell it out loud in order to determine if it sounds right.	Write it in order to determine if it feels right.
5. When I write, I...	Am concerned how neat and well-spaced my letters and words appear.	Often say the letters and words to myself.	Push hard on my pen or pencil and can feel the flow of the words or letters as I form them.
6. If I had to remember a list of items, I would remember it best if I...	Wrote them down.	Said them over and over to myself.	Moved around and used my fingers to name each item.
7. I prefer teachers who:	Use the board or overhead projector while they lecture.	Talk with a lot of expression.	Use hands-on activities.
8. When trying to concentrate, I have a difficult time when...	There is a lot of clutter or movement in the room.	There is a lot of noise in the room.	I have to sit still for any length of time.
9. When solving a problem, I...	Write or draw diagrams to see it.	Talk myself through it.	Use my entire body or move objects to help me think.
10. If I had to verbally describe something to another person, I would...	Be brief because I do not like to talk at length.	Go into great detail because I like to talk.	Gesture and move around while talking.
11. If someone were verbally describing something to me, I would...	Try to visualize what she was saying.	Enjoy listening but want to interrupt and talk myself.	Become bored if her description got too long and detailed.
12. When trying to recall names, I remember...	Faces but forget names.	Names, but forget faces.	The situation that I met the person other than the person’s name or face.

My primary learning style is: _____

My secondary learning style is: _____