

Learning Styles

Understanding and Using Learning Styles

By Melissa Kelly, About.com Guide

Students, in fact all individuals, are most effective when they are taught in their personal learning style. In fact, there are three major types of learners: visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic. While most individuals without disabilities can learn using any one of these styles, most people have one for which they show a stronger affinity.

A Look at the Three Learning Styles

Visual Learners - Visual learners are those who generally think in terms of pictures. They often prefer to see things written down in a handout, text or on the overhead. They find maps, graphs, charts, and other visual learning tools to be extremely effective. They remember things best by seeing something written.

Auditory Learners - Auditory learners are those who generally learn best by listening. They typically like to learn through lectures, discussions, and reading aloud. They remember best through hearing or saying items aloud.

Kinesthetic/Tactile Learners- Kinesthetic, also called tactile, learners are those who learn best through touching, feeling, and experiencing that which they are trying to learn. They remember best by writing or physically manipulating the information.

Learning Style Assessments

There are many tests available to help you and your students discover your best learning style. Generally speaking, however, if you are someone who is more likely to think in pictures, prefer to meet with someone in person, and are more likely to want visual diagrams when completing a project you have tendencies towards visual learning. Similarly, if you are more likely to think in terms of sounds, prefer to speak on the phone with someone, and want verbal instructions then you tend towards auditory learning. Finally, if you are more likely to think in terms of moving images like mini-movies in your mind, prefer to participate in an activity when you meet to speak with someone, and tend to jump right into a project without reading directions you tend towards tactile/kinesthetic learning.

How to Effectively Use Learning Styles in Class

In the best of all possible worlds, you would incorporate all three learning styles into each of your lessons. However, this is just not possible in the real world of teaching. In truth, it is often not hard to include both auditory and visual learning styles in your lessons. For example, you can have instructions written on the board and say them out loud. However, it is not always as easy to include the tactile/kinesthetic learning style into your lessons. The sad truth is that many students have this as their strongest learning style. It is best to not force the issue but instead find natural places to include kinesthetic learning. If your class warrants it, you could include simulations, role-playing, debates, or the use of manipulatives.

Concerns When Incorporating Learning Styles

Though rarer today than in the past, some teachers discount the importance of learning styles. They continue to teach in their one major method without trying to vary instructional methods. This is a mistake that will lead to less learning in the classroom.

On the other hand, many students and to a lesser degree some teachers make the mistake of thinking that they cannot learn using methods that are not focused on their learning style. This is also a huge mistake that in the end will result in less learning. If teachers do not help their students find ways to be successful learning information presented in any style, they are not helping them succeed in the future. The fact is that students will be faced with many different styles of teaching during the educational career. Only by finding ways to adapt and learn using other styles, will students end up succeeding.