

This guide includes information on learning styles and some strategies to promote effective teaching and learning.

It focuses on:

- the importance of learning styles
- different learning styles
- understanding and applying different learning styles
- analysing preferred learning styles
- developing learning styles for use in the classroom.

The importance of learning styles

There can be a discrepancy between the way the brain learns and the way students are taught. Students will absorb content better if they use their preferred learning style to learn. Finding out about students' preferred learning styles can:

- inform teaching and learning
- help to formulate clear learning plans for individuals and/or groups
- link preferred learning styles with goals and objectives
- ensure that students' individual needs are better met
- empower students to be more effective and independent learners
- enable students to build on their strengths and work on their weaknesses
- aid differentiated learning.

What is meant by a learning style?

A learning style is the way in which an individual learner approaches learning, experiences learning and uses information. Filling in questionnaires and quizzes to determine preferred learning styles can be fun but will not be effective unless the results inform teaching and learning activities. How teachers present something is often as important as what they say – indeed it may determine whether it is understood at all.

Different learning styles

Research shows that approximately one-third of the population has a preferred learning style that is visual, one-third that is auditory and one-third that is kinaesthetic. It is possible that each preferred learning style could be genetically inherited, dependent upon which part of the brain is most receptive in each of the three areas, or influenced by the way we were taught. Some students have a preferred learning style that is:

- visual – they learn mainly through seeing
- auditory – they learn mainly through hearing
- kinaesthetic – they learn mainly through doing.

Some students will have a combination of two or even three of the learning styles. Visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles are associated with accelerated learning and are widely used throughout primary and secondary schools. Students' preferred learning styles can change and develop over time.

Understanding and applying different learning styles

By finding out a student's preferred learning style, teachers will be able to identify possible challenges for him or her. Evidence suggests that students attracted to vocational courses are more likely to prefer a kinaesthetic learning style. Many students enjoy the practical element of a vocational course but find the theory part quite challenging. One of the reasons for this is that theory tends to be taught in a visual and auditory way and, therefore, the kinaesthetic learner finds it more of a challenge than the other learners.

Analysing preferred learning styles

There are many quizzes and questionnaires to help analyse visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles. Diagnostic procedures can be used to determine students' preferred learning styles and teachers who use them should find that within a class, all three styles feature. If all students are coming out as equally efficient in all three styles then there is something wrong with the test. In the same way, survey results that show all students to be of the same height are questionable. Try the common-sense way of diagnosing preferred learning styles (see below).

A common-sense way of diagnosing preferred learning styles

1. Ikea test

One good way to find out your preferred learning style is to do the Ikea or MFI test, which relates to how you tackle a purchase that requires self-assembling. If you buy something that you have to assemble when you get it home, do you:

- a. open the packaging and try to put the item together without reading the instructions?
- b. read all the instructions before you attempt to assemble the item?
- c. hand the instructions to someone else to read them to you, or read them aloud yourself?

2. Mobile phone test

Similarly, when you buy a new mobile phone, do you:

- a. take it out of the box and fiddle with the pieces before you read any instructions?
- b. read all the instructions before you attempt to press any buttons?
- c. ask someone else to read the instructions to you and explain how the phone works, or read the instructions out loud to yourself?

3. Map reading

Many people use a map and possibly write down some directions when finding their way to a new location. Do you:

- look at a map and follow all the roads with your finger?
- look at the whole map and then look at every road?
- read out every road to yourself?

Please circle the relevant answer below.

- a** = K **b** = V **c** = A
- a** = K **b** = V **c** = A
- a** = K **b** = V **c** = A

K = kinaesthetic
V = visual
A = auditory

Remember that diagnostic assessment through quizzes and questionnaires provides only a guide to an individual's preferred learning style. Sometimes it is possible to judge a person's preferred learning style by their behaviour. For example, people who are:

- visual learners usually enjoy reading books and may appear to daydream during a session that involves lots of verbal activities
- auditory learners usually like discussion in lessons and may whisper when reading
- kinaesthetic learners usually remember things that they do and experience and may tap their pencil or pen on the desk during a lesson.

Developing learning styles for use in the classroom

Having looked at the visual, auditory and kinaesthetic learning styles, the next step for teachers is to review their schemes of work and lesson plans. Do the schemes of work include visual, auditory and kinaesthetic activities in each lesson? Work through the schemes of work and lesson plans highlighting visual activities in green, auditory activities in yellow and kinaesthetic activities in blue. Then it is possible to see at a glance the balance of activities. Undertaking this task as a whole department and then pooling the resources together will make lesson-planning more effective.

By deploying teaching strategies that include all three learning styles in a lesson, teachers can ensure that every lesson is differentiated and that every student's individual learning need will be met.

Preferred learning styles can also be included in an individual or student action plan. Look at some of the strategies below that can be used to help students become independent learners.

For visual learners:

- use lots of Post-it Notes, posters, cue cards, diagrams and charts
- place information, keywords and posters above eye level in the classroom
- use coloured pens and paper
- incorporate tracing activities
- use mind maps and spider diagrams.

For auditory learners:

- engage in classroom discussion
- use poetry, rhyme, rhythm, rap and jingles
- read passages out loud
- have background music on
- read out practice questions.

For kinaesthetic learners:

- build in regular, planned breaks
- use Brain Gym
- organise groupwork, role play and games
- use cue cards or Post-it Notes to make key points and manoeuvre them around until the content makes sense
- incorporate model-making.

Finally, remember the key to meeting individual students' needs is to ensure a variety of learning styles in every lesson.

Further information

The Learning and Skills Development Agency can provide advice on the different types of learning styles and suitable assessments.

Learning and Skills Development Agency

Regent Arcade House
19–25 Argyll Street
London
W1F 7LS

Tel 020 7297 9000
www.LSDA.org.uk

Contact the Vocational Learning Support Programme – 14–16 for information on all aspects of vocational and work-related learning at Key stage 4.

Vocational Learning Support Programme – 14–16

Tel 020 7297 9140
www.vocationallearning.org.uk

Websites

www.aqa.org.uk
www.dfes.gov.uk
www.edexcel.org.uk
www.ocr.org.uk
www.qca.org.uk
www.wjec.org.uk

Further reading

Buzan T (2003). *The mind map book: radiant thinking – major evolution in human thought*, BBC Books.

Hughes M (1999). *Closing the learning gap*, Network Educational Press Ltd.

Robinson K (2001). *Out of our minds: learning to be creative*, Capstone Publishing Ltd.

Smith A (1998). *Accelerated learning in practice*, Network Educational Press Ltd.

Quick guides

Project manager: Ian Duckett
Edited and designed by thingswedo
Printed by Blackmore Ltd
© Learning and Skills Development Agency
2nd edition, February 2005