

Learning Styles

Most people would agree that we all learn differently. There is much debate about the scientific basis for learning styles, but people do appear to favor different ways of acquiring and processing information. If we can understand the learning style categories that appear to fit us, we can adopt the best study methods for us as individuals. Let's explore the seven commonly noted learning styles based on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence Theory. Try to identify the learning style(s) that apply to you.

Visual (Spatial)

People who are visual learners prefer it when information is visually presented. They benefit from charts, graphs, tables, illustrations and photographs. They like material that is organized visually, like color-coded information. They find it easier to recall things they have seen rather than things they've heard.

Visual Learner Tips: Sit close to the front of the classroom so you can easily see anything written on the board or projected on the screen. When taking notes, include drawings, charts, symbols, and other visual aids. Create your own visual aids, such as flowcharts, to represent processes and other information. Highlight key terms in your notes and textbooks. Don't ignore the graphics in your textbook. When you study, close your eyes and visualize the place on the whiteboard, the color of the marker, and other visual details when the instructor wrote something on the board- this can help you remember what they wrote.

Aural (Auditory)

Aural learners like to hear something out loud to better understand it. You benefit a lot from lessons that involve listening and speaking. You notice changes in tone, volume, etc. You recall sound experiences over things you've seen or felt.

Aural Learner Tips: When reading, do it out loud, even if you have to whisper. Hearing yourself speak will help you remember what you are reading. Study with music. Create songs or rhymes to memorize information. Consider using audiobooks. Participate in classroom discussions. If the instructor allows it, record the class lectures. Take part in study groups. When you study, close your eyes and recall the sounds in the classroom when important material was presented- this may help you recall what was shared.

Verbal (Linguistic)

Verbal learners enjoy using words and language. They learn from expressing themselves through writing or speaking. The key is not whether the material is written or spoken to them, but they get more out of making use of the language. Like aural learners, they enjoy rhymes and wordplay. These people use puns, emphasize the double-meaning of words, etc.

Verbal Learner Tips: Use role-playing to learn and remember information. Create rhymes to memorize material. Make use of Mnemonics, which are memory aids- like acronyms to remember lists. An example is using the word HOMES to remember the names of the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior). Use vocabulary words in sentences. When reading, pause periodically and repeat what you just read, but do it in your own words. When studying, pretend you are the instructor and give an imaginary lecture in your own words. Take part in study groups so you can verbalize what you have been studying.

Physical (Kinesthetic/Tactile)

Traditionally, physical learners have been called hands-on learners. They learn by doing. The learning happens when they carry out a physical activity. They prefer to get involved in moving or doing something to learn, rather than hearing a lecture or reading about it.

Physical Learner Tips: Participate in class demonstrations and role-playing activities. Take part in projects that allow you to do or create something related to what you are studying. Walk or move while you read. Drawing or making models can help you learn and remember material. Handle things like flashcards while you study. Fidgeting, like bouncing your leg or playing with your hair, can help while studying or taking tests. If you have to memorize something, use movement to help you- for example, when reciting a list, touch each of your fingers as you say each item. Associate the first item on the list with touching your index finger, the second item with touching the middle finger, etc.

Logical (Mathematical)

Logical learners are good with numbers and can easily recognize patterns and connect ideas. They search for patterns and trends in what they learn and try to connect concepts. While learning, they are interested in the reasons for things, how things fit together, and what the results are when ideas are implemented. They love to solve riddles and mysteries. These people enjoy fitting the pieces of a puzzle together to find the answer.

Logical Learner Tips: When studying, find ways to group information together. Look for numeric patterns in what you are studying. Arrange material numerically, for example, listing things from smallest to largest. Perform experiments to test the information you have been learning. Look for the big picture and how the different pieces of information connect. Use flow charts, graphs, and other visual aids to show patterns and connections. Look at what you are learning as if it is a mystery to solve. Use reasoning and problem-solving skills.

Social (Interpersonal)

Social learners are those who prefer to learn with others. In addition to enjoying the social interaction, they gain more insight when they can discuss and bounce ideas off others.

Social Learner Tips: Take part in class discussions and group activities. Tell stories and give illustrations that support the topic being discussed. Join a study group. Incorporate role-playing into your learning. Use games and team challenges to learn. Social learning is especially beneficial for drilling each others and testing your knowledge of material you have already studied on your own.

Solitary (Intrapersonal)

Solitary learners gain more information studying on their own. They thrive when by themselves. They learn better when they're alone to focus and reflect on the material they are studying.

Solitary Learner Tips: On your own, take time to read, write and reflect on the material presented in the classroom. Use journals and other ways to record your insights. Create a place that is dedicated to studying and reflecting. Since you are less likely to get information from fellow students, get as many resources and materials to help you study on your own. Use websites, books, etc. recommended by the instructor to supplement your studies.

By identifying our individual learning styles, we can tailor our study practices to give ourselves the best advantage. When we realize that one kind of study method does not fit everyone, we can be free to use what is right for us.