



# Learning Styles

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Students often have a preferred mode of learning: some students learn best by seeing (visual), others by hearing (auditory) and others by touching and moving (kinesthetic). Some students do not have a strong preference. For others, their preference may vary depending on the situation and type of information. Learning and skill development are enhanced if teachers recognize differences and vary instruction accordingly. Acknowledging, understanding and accepting the concept of learning styles can lead to responsive instruction where teachers provide a wide variety of lessons, use a broad range of strategies, activities and types of assessment materials and methods.

Teaching to all learning styles benefits students because it ensures that each student's learning style preference is addressed, thereby enhancing opportunities for the student to learn material and develop skills. The concept of learning styles can also help students understand how they learn best and develop strategies for dealing with areas of difficulty.

There are many inventories for teachers and students to identify preferred learning styles. See [Learning Styles Inventory I](#), [Learning Styles Inventory II](#) and [Learning Styles Inventory III](#) for samples. Because students learn in different ways and their preferred way may even be situationally dependent, the key for teachers is to acknowledge differences and provide varied instruction and assessment.

## Strategies to Address Specific Learning Styles

The following strategies and activities address specified modes of learning styles and can be used in various combinations in any particular lesson to suit the different ways in which students learn.

### **Kinesthetic Style**

Consider the following sample activities to address kinesthetic learning:

- classroom demonstrations
- experiential learning, role-playing, simulation activities, field trips

- painting, drawing, creating models
- clapping or tapping out numbers or syllables
- lab work
- note-taking
- show and tell
- games, puzzles, manipulatives
- using sandpaper or felt letters, writing in sand or clay, using three-dimensional letters and numbers.

### **Visual Style**

Consider the following sample activities and strategies to address visual learning:

- viewing artifacts, objects, models
- viewing slides, transparencies, illustrations, graphics, demonstrations
- using an abacus, colour-coding systems, rulers and number lines, visual symbols for sound
- examining maps, charts, graphs, pictures, diagrams
- experiments using microscopes
- matching games
- providing visual clues on the chalkboard for all verbal directions
- encouraging visualization techniques (e.g., visualize spelling words)
- using coloured markers, pens or chalk on the overhead or blackboard.

### **Auditory Style**

Consider the following sample activities and strategies to address auditory learning:

- direct instruction, lecturing
- having students verbalize tasks
- using tape recorders; for example, having students listen to a tape while they read
- reading to students, paraphrasing
- providing listening centres
- allowing students to think out loud and spell audibly
- using records, tapes and films
- incorporating music, rhythm, melody
- rhyming games, debating, radio plays and discussions
- giving verbal as well as written directions.

To help you plan lessons that incorporate all three learning styles, use the [Learning Styles Lesson Planner](#).

# Learning Styles Inventory I: Student self-evaluation<sup>1</sup>

There are different ways to learn. Indicate your preference by placing a number in the circles:  
1 = Always, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Seldom.

## I PREFER LEARNING BY:

- reading books and magazines
- listening to a person talk or a tape recorder
- watching people do things
- watching films, TV or movies
- putting things together and taking them apart
- experimenting with things
- playing a game
- acting it out

## I PREFER WORKING:

- alone
- with an adult
- for one long period
- in the morning
- with a friend
- in a group
- for several short periods
- in the afternoon
- in the evening

## I PREFER SHARING BY:

- telling about it
- building something about it
- acting it out
- writing about it
- drawing or painting about it
- talking to other people about it

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1. Adapted with permission from Edmonton Public Schools, *Academic Challenge: A Programming Guide* (Edmonton, AB: Edmonton Public Schools, 1988), p. 335.

## Learning Styles Inventory II: Sensory Preferences

Kinesthetic Learner	Visual Learner	Auditory Learner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learns by doing</li> <li>• likes doing things with hands</li> <li>• points finger when reading</li> <li>• looks confined in the classroom</li> <li>• responds physically when listening to a story</li> <li>• often fidgets, drops things, squiggles in the desk or moves around</li> <li>• likes to set up equipment</li> <li>• touches to get attention</li> <li>• stands closer to the person he is talking to than most people do</li> <li>• responds to physical touch</li> <li>• feels everything (e.g., rubs hands along wall while in lunch line or walking down hallway; puts hands on door frame; touches desks while moving down the aisle)</li> <li>• is well coordinated—good at sports</li> <li>• frequently uses fists</li> <li>• likes to write on the blackboard</li> <li>• takes extensive notes during lectures</li> <li>• has difficulty reading and listening, and poor language development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learns by seeing</li> <li>• likes orderly, attractive, neat surroundings</li> <li>• sees changes and details—errors on board or typing, missing buttons, scruffy shoes</li> <li>• remembers where objects are located, what is seen</li> <li>• organizes by size, colour or other visual clues</li> <li>• would rather read than be read to; chooses books for pictures or illustrations</li> <li>• doodles or draws with great detail; pictures have good balance</li> <li>• likes to assist with displays, bulletin boards</li> <li>• likes descriptions and demonstrations</li> <li>• finds phonics difficult unless a picture accompanies sound; recognizes words by sight</li> <li>• has difficulty with verbal directions</li> <li>• remembers faces more than names; watches speaker's face intently</li> <li>• tends to be quiet and observant, especially in new situations; rarely talks in class and responds in as few words as possible</li> <li>• takes notes and has good handwriting</li> <li>• tends to be deliberate and organized; thinks and plans in advance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learns by hearing and speaking</li> <li>• tends to chatter or make other noises</li> <li>• likes phonics—spoken language is easier than written; moves lips and whispers when reading to self</li> <li>• good story teller; tells jokes, uses humour</li> <li>• expresses emotions verbally; uses expressive vocabulary</li> <li>• knows all the words to songs, slogans, jingles</li> <li>• can easily memorize</li> <li>• poor handwriting, history of reversals</li> <li>• requires oral interpretation of charts, maps, diagrams</li> <li>• tends to talk to self aloud; says material to self in order to learn it</li> <li>• likes to discuss what needs to be done; talk through problems and solutions</li> <li>• transmits messages accurately</li> <li>• enjoys music and rhythmic activities</li> <li>• easily distracted by sounds</li> </ul>

## Learning Styles Inventory III: Observable Characteristics<sup>2</sup>

The following chart outlines various sensory strengths and potential behavioural observations. It can be used to highlight matching observations about individual students over time in order to develop a profile of sensory strengths.

Learning Style	Visual Learns by seeing, watching demonstrations	Auditory Learns through verbal instructions	Kinesthetic Learns by doing, direct involvement
Reading	Likes description, sometimes stops reading to stare into space and imagine scene, intense concentration	Enjoys dialogue, plays, avoids lengthy description, unaware of illustrations, moves lips or subvocalizes	Prefers stories where action occurs early, fidgets when reading, handles books, not an avid reader
Spelling	Recognizes words by sight, relies on configuration of words	Uses a phonics approach, has auditory word-attack skills	Often is a poor speller, writes words to determine if they "feel" right
Handwriting	Tends to be good, particularly when young, spacing and size are good, appearance is important	Has more difficulty learning in initial stages, tends to write lightly, says strokes when writing	Good initially, deteriorates when space becomes smaller, pushes harder on writing instrument
Memory	Remembers faces, forgets names, writes things down, takes notes	Remembers names, forgets faces, remembers by auditory repetition	Remembers best what was done, not what was seen or talked about
Imagery	Vivid imagination, thinks in pictures, visualizes in detail	Subvocalizes, thinks in sounds, details less important	Imagery not important, images that do occur are accompanied by movement
Distractibility	Generally unaware of sounds, distracted by visual disorder or movement	Easily distracted by sounds	Not attentive to visual, auditory presentation so seems distracted
Problem Solving	Deliberate, plans in advance, organizes thoughts by writing them, lists problems	Talks problems out, tries solutions verbally, subvocally, talks self through problems	Attacks problems physically, impulsive, selects solution involving greatest activity
Response to Inactivity	Stares, doodles, finds something to watch	Hums, talks to self or to others	Fidgets, finds reasons to move, holds up hand
Response to New Situations	Looks around, examines structure	Talks about situations, pros and cons, what to do	Tries things out, touches, feels, manipulates
Emotionality	Somewhat repressed, stares when angry, cries easily, beams when happy, facial expression is a good index of emotion	Shouts with joy or anger, blows up verbally but soon calms down, expresses emotions verbally and through changes in tone, volume, pitch of voice	Jumps for joy, tugs and pulls when happy, stamps, jumps and pounds when angry, stomps off, general body tone is good index of emotion
Communication	Quiet, does not talk at length, becomes impatient when extensive listening is required, may use words clumsily, describes without embellishment, uses words such as <i>see, look</i> , etc.	Enjoys listening but cannot wait to talk, descriptions are long and repetitive, likes hearing self and others talk, uses words such as <i>listen, hear</i> , etc.	Gestures when speaking, does not listen well, stands close when speaking or listening, quickly loses interest in detailed verbal disclosure, uses words such as <i>get, take</i> , etc.
General Appearance	Neat, meticulous, likes order, may chose not to vary appearance	Matching clothes not so important, can explain choices of others	Neat but soon becomes wrinkled through activity
Response to the Arts	Not particularly responsive to music, prefers the visual arts, tends not to voice appreciation of art of any kind, but can be deeply affected by visual displays, focuses on details and parts rather than the work as a whole	Favors music, finds less appeal in visual art but is readily able to discuss it, misses significant detail but appreciates work as a whole, is able to develop verbal association for all art forms, spends more time talking about pieces than looking at them	Responds to music by physical movement, prefers sculpture, touches statues and paintings, at exhibits stops at only those in which he or she can become physically involved, comments little on any art form

2. From *Teaching through modality strengths* (pp. 44, 45), by W. B. Barbe and R. H. Swassing (Columbus, OH: Zaner-Bloser, Inc., 1979). Used with permission from Zaner-Bloser, Inc.

# Learning Styles Lesson Planner<sup>3</sup>

Think about a skill, concept or process you will teach during the coming week/month/term and complete the following to plan a lesson or unit that will address the different ways students learn.

1. a. Identify and record what the intended learning will be.

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- b. Write out an objective for your intended learning.

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2. a. Briefly explain how you will introduce your lesson.

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- b. Go back and look at your introduction. Did you address visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning modalities equally? If not, prepare what you might say or do to adjust your introduction.

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3. Brainstorm for activities you will include in your lesson to address a variety of learning modalities.

Visual Activities	Auditory Activities	Kinesthetic Activities

4. Generate alternative ways to evaluate for modality accommodation within your lesson.

Visual Evaluation	Auditory Evaluation	Kinesthetic Evaluation

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