

Learning – what helps, what hinders

2. Styles of Learning: Visual, Auditory and

Kinaesthetic

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While each individual has his or her own way of learning, with its little personal quirks, there are three basic styles in which people learn: Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic (learning by doing). Almost everyone uses all three of these to some degree but, equally, almost everyone has a preferred style of learning. It is very useful, indeed, I would say, essential, that a teacher should consider and identify a pupil's "natural" style of learning because then teaching in the way the pupil learns best, most quickly and clearly, can take place. The pupil will feel less muddled and more comfortable, a good teacher/pupil rapport will be easier to establish, so the atmosphere will be happier, the pupil more co-operative, the teacher more satisfied and, one sincerely hopes, progress good.

Of course, many good, sensitive teachers will be aware that, by instinct and experience, they utilise different methods of teaching to suit different types of learner but it can still be useful to define their styles of learning.

So, how to identify the pupil's style of learning?



The Visual learner (whom I shall call Visual Victor) likes to see what to do. He visualises life and learning as a series of pictures as if there is a film constantly running through his head. He will want to read about something before he tries it. He understands diagrams and plans easily so he will memorise maps and learn blue lines. Visual Victor will like to see the "big picture", an overview of the whole thing with the key concepts and full pattern clear when processing information. He is probably good at written forms of learning and does/did well at exams. Although he tends to be less distracted by background noise than other types of learner, if he's interrupted when he's concentrating he's very likely to lose track of where he was. When he's ringing he is probably the member of the band who is better corrected with gestures and pointing than the spoken word. He needs to see what to do so his teacher should demonstrate while he watches, show him diagrams and pictures and suggest books he might study. He daydreams while creating pictures in his mind but, when talking to you, Visual Victor will make good eye contact and will tend to use "seeing" phrases, such as, "I see what you mean" or "That looks like a good idea".



Auditory Alice likes to be told what to do. She appreciates a set of oral instructions before she attempts something and will repeat them to herself, either openly or in her head. She feels comfortable with logical progressions and likes to work in small steps, in a sequence. If she is interrupted while speaking she will not lose track

but will pick up from where she broke off. Her teacher should tell her in words what to do and, if the instruction is comparatively complicated, it is a good idea to ask Alice to explain what she is about to do before she tries it. Auditory Alice may well be a good mimic of voices and sounds and is likely to be better than average at remembering jokes and stories. She may talk to herself, giving herself instructions as she does anything and those people who mutter all the time they are ringing are probably Auditory Alices. She likes the conductor to correct her by voice. She habitually uses phrases like, "I hear what you say" and "That sounds like a good idea".



Kinaesthetic Kim learns by doing. She likes to get on with the job, sometimes having a go before she really knows what she is doing (and failing!) This is unlikely to distress her but she must have positive feelings about a task before she begins. She will happily take instructions as she goes and instinctively knows that preparation beforehand will not help her to remember something new anything like as well as practising it. Indeed, she works a good deal by instinct and is the sort of person who will be ruled by her heart rather than her head. She is often an active person and inclined to fidget, playing with her fingers, touching things, rattling keys, coins etc as this

sort of fiddling with things helps her concentrate. She is sensitive to non-verbal communication, such as the tone of a voice, body language and facial expressions. Kinaesthetic Kim will make comments like, "I grasp your meaning" and "That would feel right".

There is a rough and ready way that a teacher can gain an idea of a new pupil's learning style (although more observation will be necessary to be sure). Often the very first thing a teacher asks a pupil to do is to take hold of the tail end. So Brand-new Betsy and her teacher enter the ringing room for the first lesson. Teacher says, "Take hold of that rope about 6 inches (if Betsy is on the elderly side) or 15 centimetres (if Betsy is young) from the end. Wrap all your fingers round it and keep your hands together with the left one nearest the end of the rope." If Betsy immediately does this, at least more or less correctly, she appears to be an auditory learner. If she looks puzzled or asks for further explanation, Teacher should say, "Like this," and demonstrate while Betsy watches. If Betsy can now confidently take hold of the rope, she is probably a visual learner. If she still seems at a loss, the teacher (remembering, in these p.c. times, to ask before physically touching her) should take hold of her hands and place them on the rope, thinking to him- or herself, "I've got a kinaesthetic learner here." Then again, Betsy just might be all in a tizzy because she is exceedingly nervous.

The following questionnaire will help you to discover which style of learning you favour most and you can have some fun doing it with pupils. (You may need to adapt some questions slightly to suit the age of the pupil.)

	A	B	C
When operating	Read the	Ask someone to	Have a go and

new equipment for the first time I prefer to . . .	instructions.	explain how to use it.	learn by trial and error.
When seeking travel directions I . . .	Look at a map	Ask for spoken directions	Follow my nose and stop and ask for directions if necessary
To teach someone something I . . .	Write instructions or draw them a diagram/picture	Explain verbally	Demonstrate, then let them have a go
When cooking a new dish I . . .	Follow a recipe	Call a friend to tell me how to do it	Follow my instinct, adding what I think will taste good
I first notice how people . . .	Look and dress	Sound and speak	Stand and move
If I have to complain about faulty goods I . . .	Write a letter	'Phone	Go back to the shop to speak to someone and show them what the problem is
When I am concentrating I . . .	Focus on words or pictures in front of me or in my head	Discuss with myself what I am doing, either out loud or in my head	Move around a lot, fiddle with things and touch unrelated objects
I remember things best by . . .	Writing notes or making diagrams/charts (often in colours) or keeping printed details	Saying them aloud or repeating words and key points in my head or getting someone to talk it over with me	Doing and practising the activity or imagining it being done
I think I can tell if someone is lying because . . .	They avoid looking at you	Their voice changes	Of the vibes I get from them
I tend to say . . .	I see what you mean	I hear what you are saying	I know how you feel
When asking about something new, I like someone to . . .	Show me	Tell me	Let me have a go
When I first contact a new person . . .	I like to meet them face to face	I prefer to talk to them on the telephone	I try to meet up with them to share an activity
When I am very angry . . .	I keep replaying in my mind what it is	I shout a good deal and tell people	I stamp about, slam doors and throw

	that has upset me	how I feel	things
When I meet someone I . . .	Smile and look into their eyes	Speak to them	Hug them or shake hands
When I learn a new method in ringing I . . .	Visualise the blue-line	Keep reciting the order of work to myself	Have a quick look at it but know I won't remember it until I've rung it a few times

More "A" answers denote a visual learner, more "B" an auditory learner and more "C" a kinaesthetic one. A few people may find they score equally for all three. Probably they do use all three styles extensively – some do – but, remember, this is a quiz for guidance, not a full psychometric assessment, so there may be a few rogue results.

Although not all authorities agree, most research suggests that kinaesthetic learners are commonest, about 37% of the population, while around 34% are auditory learners and 29% visual. And don't be misguided by the sexes of Victor, Alice and Kim, as all three types of learning style are divided pretty much equally between males and females.

Imagine the situation: you, the teacher, are reminding Visual Victor about the order of work in Bob Doubles. "It's make seconds, dodge 3-4 down, long 5ths, dodge 3-4 up," you say. You know he knows all this really but he looks puzzled. You have put him to the extra work of converting your words into pictures and diagrams in his head and, probably, you (maybe, not even remembering what it is like not to know Bob Doubles) spoke too

fast for him to "translate" it all in order. If you had drawn him a diagram, or pointed out where each piece of work comes on a printed blue line, he would have caught on immediately and you would be helping him to internalise the knowledge.

However, show Auditory Alice a blue line, pointing out that dodges come here and here and she looks bamboozled and may start to mutter the order of work to herself because what she needed was to hear what to do.

Kinaesthetic Kim will probably get bored more quickly than the average pupil with too much theory (not that she doesn't need a bit) but she wants to get on with it and, possibly requiring verbal reminders of the next piece of work as she rings, will learn best this way.

The teacher should, however, be cautious about pushing Visual Victor and Auditory Alice into ringing something "by the seat of their pants" before they feel ready. If they manage well, it will, of course, boost their confidence; if they don't, their confidence could be severely knocked.

Either way, it is unlikely to help them remember what to do next time.

A Couple More Cautions

A pupil's style of learning is the way in which that person best comes to understand and commit to memory a new topic. The style of learning may be unrelated to the way the pupil performs in a physical situation. In ringing one of the teacher's functions is to lead pupils to develop purely visual (ropesight), auditory (listening) and kinaesthetic (rhythm) skills. Ability and progress in these important areas will not necessarily go along with the natural learning style. For instance, the visual learner may well develop good rhythm before ropesight or the auditory learner may (or may not) be very slow to achieve listening skills.

Recently a friend asked me for directions to a place we planned to visit. "Get me a piece of paper and I'll draw you a map," I said. Then, before either of us had time to move, I added, "Maybe, not. I'm not sure you're a visual learner." She, understanding such things (she's a psychiatrist), replied, "No, I'm an auditory learner." So, I told her how to get there with a lot of lefts and rights. It wouldn't have done for me – I'm a strongly visual learner – but she found the place, no difficulty. It is very easy, natural even, to assume that everyone learns the same way that you, yourself, do and to try to make others learn that way too. But it is not good teaching.

Multi-Sensory Teaching

Even though a pupil may respond best if there is something to see or to hear

or a practical element to learning, especially in one-to-one situations, multi-sensory teaching is often most effective and certainly so where a group is involved. Each pupil's preferred style of learning will be accommodated but with "extras". For multi-sensory teaching the instructor must appeal to as many of the pupils' senses as possible. Show them diagrams and pictures while you are explaining in words, give a demonstration, let them touch items and try out what has been demonstrated.

Some years ago a computer programme called "Daisy" was invented which read aloud the words a student was looking at on the screen. I've no doubt there are many computer programmes that will do that now. Anyway, "Daisy" was produced as an aid for blind and partially-sighted pupils. It was then thought it might be of help to dyslexic students. Research was carried out with both pupils who required learning support and "normal" ones. It was discovered that, in terms of understanding and retaining information, all groups performed to a higher level when they had looked at the words and heard them spoken at the same time.

So, whenever possible, aim to combine looking, listening, touching and doing in a lesson. Many professional teachers learn to do this more or less automatically when they are in front of a class.

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