

Understanding Your Learning Style

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Welcome to “Understanding Your Learning Style”. This brief workshop is designed to help you gain a preliminary understanding of the different types of learning styles, and study techniques to help you optimize your own learning style. Lets begin.

What Are Learning Styles?

Learning styles are different methods of learning or understanding new information.

Learning styles are the way a person takes in, understands, expresses, and remembers information.

Perhaps the most simple way of describing 'learning styles' is to say that they are different methods of learning or understanding new information, the way a person takes in, understand, expresses and remembers information. There are 4 predominant learning styles: Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinaesthetic. While most of us may have some general idea about how we learn best, often it comes as a surprise when we discover what our predominant learning style is. Lets take a few moments and explore each of these learning styles in more detail.

Visual Learner

- ✧ Visual learners learn through various visual displays of information.
- ✧ Tools to utilize: diagrams, charts, and pictures.
- ✧ When taking notes, rewrite words with symbols or initials.
- ✧ Try different spatial arrangements with your notes.
- ✧ Underline and use **different colours** and highlighters.

Visual learners learn through seeing, so tools like diagrams, flowcharts, pictures and symbols can be key to understanding new concepts.

As University style lectures tend to neglect visual components, it may be difficult for you

visual learners out there to stay focused during a long lecture. When taking notes in class,

something to try is developing a system of symbols to replace the written word. For example, instead of writing out “female” each time in your notes, simply use the standard

symbol. Or instead of writing that the results of a particular test were positive, insert a

smiley face!

For visual learners, it is often far easier for recall to work with images as opposed to working

with words, as you will picture the image in your head while recalling it—far more difficult

when trying to recall the word itself!

Other tricks to try for visual learners include spatially rearranging your page—instead of

writing across a page horizontally, write in a way that is more descriptive of the

relationship
being described—for example, write the words out in a circular pattern if that more
truly
represents the relationship you are describing.

Also, it can be useful to colour code your notes, to create more visual stimulation.

Auditory Learning

- ✧ Auditory learners learn through listening.
- ✧ Lectures and discussion groups are important for this type of learner.
- ✧ Tools to utilize: read text out loud, pay attention to tone of speaker, discuss concepts with others for increased understanding.
- ✧ Record your summarized notes on tape and listen to them later.
- ✧ Discuss the concepts being taught with another person.
- ✧ Use these discussions to expand your lecture notes (leave extra space so this is possible).
- ✧ Attending lectures and tutorials is very important—you want to hear how the professor will explain a concept.

Auditory learners learn through listening. As such, attending lectures, tutorials, and group discussions are absolutely essential for these learners (it's also essential for the rest of us, being a read/write learner is no reason to skip lecture!).

If you're an auditory learner, help yourself focus on text book readings by reading them out loud, so you can hear how the words sound. It can also be really helpful to engage in group discussions about course concepts and topics—create a weekly study group to get together weekly just to talk about the things being discussed in lectures.

Leave lots of extra room on your page when taking notes in lectures, and then return to these notes after you've had a chance to discuss the material in further detail—supplement with the new information you have.

Read/Write Learning

- ✧ Read/Write learners learn through just that—reading and writing.
- ✧ Tools to utilize: glossaries, re-reading notes and textbooks, re-writing your notes out into different words.
- ✧ Use many lists, and rearrange these lists into multiple choice questions.
- ✧ It is very important to understand the words used in your course: keep a running glossary of any new or unfamiliar terms for future reference.
- ✧ Re-read and Re-write textbook and lecture notes.

Read/write learners learn through—what else?—reading and writing. As such, university style courses suit these types of learners fairly well—plenty of text books and study notes to read.

If you're a read/write learner, pay special attention to text book glossaries—better yet, make your own as you progress through a course. After lecture, return to your notes for review, read them over, and then create a new, condensed set of study notes. Lists can also be a very useful tool.

And a good tip for all students is to rewrite explanation and notes out into your own words.

If you can't rewrite a definition or describe a concept in your own words, concisely, there is a good chance that there is an aspect of that concept that you don't fully understand. Return to this concept for further review.

Kinesthetic Learning

- ◇ Kinesthetic learners learn through doing.
- ◇ Use all of your senses—sight, touch, taste, smell, hearing.
- ◇ Tools to utilize: incorporate examples into notes, attend labs or tutorials.
- ◇ Include many examples in your notes (try to come up with your own real-life examples).
- ◇ Use of practice exams or questions will be especially helpful.

Kinaesthetic Learners learn through doing. This is perhaps the most challenging learning style for university students, as there are not always many opportunities to engage in hands on learning in lectures. For this reason, labs and tutorials become even more essential for these learners.

While studying, try to incorporate all of your senses into the experience—the more of this you can do, the higher your recall will be, as you'll have multiple cues.

One way to create more useful study notes if you're a kinaesthetic learner is to fill your notes with several examples for each concept. Try taking an example from the text, or lecture, or lab, and then try creating your own example. As a general rule, the more personal your created example is, the better your recall will be for that example—and hopefully for the concept it is describing!

Also try to make as much use of practise questions and exams as possible.

What Learning Style Are You?

- ◇ The VARK is a 16 question survey designed to help you identify your own learning style.

www.vark-learn.com

As was mentioned earlier, although most of us will have a sense of our learning style, we may be surprised to find out what our style really is. So if it can be challenging to determine, how do you know?

The VARK is a 16 question survey that was designed to help you self-identify your learning style by presenting you with a variety of learning or explaining scenarios and asking you how you would best make a decision, or give advice, or integrate this new information.

In the example above, response a) would be indicative of an auditory learner, response b) of a read/write learner, and response c) of a visual learner.

To take the VARK, visit their website and take the test online. Alternately, visit the Study Skills & Supplemental Instruction office to make an appointment to discuss your learning style with an academic mentor.

Final Thoughts

- ✧ Learning Styles can and do change over time.
- ✧ Employ Multimodal Learning.
- ✧ They provide study tips for every student.

Although many of us remain fairly constant in our learning preference throughout time, styles can and do change with some regularity—this can be influenced by your learning environment—perhaps after several years at university you’ll discover that you have become more of a read/write learner than you were in high school. For this reason, it can be a good idea to retake the VARK annually to ensure that you’re using study methods that best suit your current learning needs.

In addition, when you take the VARK, you will notice that you will most likely have a preference for one type of learning, although you will also respond positively for other styles as well (for example, you may predominantly be a visual learner, with a VARK score of 7, although you also show tendencies for read/write learning with a score of 5).

Yet another possibility is that of the multimodal learner. You are a multimodal learner if you display two or more equally or near equally predominant learning preferences.

Although it may seem desirable, now that you can easily find out what your learning

style

is, to only use study methods that seem to match with your style, this is not the best option. Instead, in each learner style there are great study strategies for all learners—

so if

you're an auditory learner, take some tips from your kinaesthetic friends and add

even

more examples into your study notes!

Practice

- ◇ We all have methods of studying that are familiar to us, and changing these habits can be a challenge.
- ◇ In order to make the most of the information here it is essential that you continually practice new skills.
- ◇ Changing formed habits is not easy, so don't be discouraged if it seems challenging at first—don't give up!

It is not easy to simply start using new study strategies, and it takes time and practise to develop new habits. At first, new study techniques may seem tedious, and you may feel like the time you're spending on that task could be put to better use. Rest assured that it takes time to develop all new habits, and after some time you'll find it becomes easier and less of a burden with each passing week. Don't give up!

Still Have Questions?

For even more help with improving your time management skills, or for advice on other ways to improve your study habits, visit our website:

www.wlu.ca/study

Call to book an appointment: 519.884.0710 ext. 2220

It can be a big challenge to change your learning strategy after so many years. For more assistance, or to complete the VARK and discuss your learning style with a Learning assistant visit our website, stop by the Study Skills Office, or call to book an appointment—you'll be glad you did!