

## Learning Styles and Strategies in Teaching English

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**Abstract:** As being English language teachers, we must understand the differences in our students' learning styles, so that we can implement best practice strategies into their daily activities, curriculum and assessments. The term "learning styles" speaks to the understanding that every student learns differently. We know that there's no one size fits all when it comes to how we can comprehend information. Everyone's learning style is different as our students have been asking questions about their learning styles in the classes. The issue of learning styles has had a huge impact on education in teaching foreign languages as well.

**Key words:** learning styles, visual, kinesetic, tactile, style

### Introduction

As being EFL teachers, it is important to understand the differences in our students' learning styles, so that we can implement best practice strategies into their daily activities, curriculum and assessments. The term "learning styles" speaks to the understanding that every student learns differently. Technically, an individual's learning style refers to the preferential way in which the student absorbs, processes, comprehends and retains information.

### Materials and Methods

According to MacKeracher (1996), learning styles may be thought of as the way in which people:

- take in information
- select certain information for further processing
- use meanings, values, skills, strategies to solve problems, make decisions, and create new meanings
- change any or all of the processes or structures described in this list

One of the most accepted understandings of learning styles is that student learning styles fall into three "categories:" **Visual Learners, Auditory Learners and Kinesthetic Learners.**

While in the classroom, students who are visual learners can benefit from instructors who use the whiteboard or overhead projector to list the important points of a lecture, or who provide an outline to follow along with during the lecture. These particular learners also benefit from information gathered from textbooks and class notes and prefer to study alone in a quiet room. Visual learners often view information through the "mind's eye" (one's ability to see things with the mind) when trying to remember something. If there is a strong preference for learning by **Visual** methods (seeing), use some or all of the following strategies to take in new information:

- Sit near the front of the classroom to eliminate visual obstructions
- take detailed notes to remember important information and use notebooks for organization
- Lecturers who use gestures and picturesque language may be helpful
- Pictures, videos, posters, slides, and screen shots are all beneficial
- Write out sentences and phrases that summarize key information obtained from your textbook, lecture, and notes
- Make flashcards of vocabulary words and concepts that need to be memorized; use highlighters to note key points on the cards. Limit the amount of information per card so the mind can take a mental "picture" of the information.

When a student processes information by reading (aloud) and hearing, then the preferred method of learning is said to be auditory. Please review the following suggestions if there is a strong preference for learning by **auditory** methods:

- Attend discussions and tutorials; start a small study group
- Recite, restate, and summarize key information and ideas to yourself
- Listen actively, carefully
- Use a recorder to record lecture to remember the interesting examples, stories, jokes...rhymes can even be made

Kinesthetic learners (active learner) need to experience knowledge through actions either by “doing” or getting personally involved with the learning process. Sometimes these learners prefer a faster paced learning experience with instructors that keep things moving at a fast pace within the classroom. Hands-on activities are very beneficial to these students along with a lab setting where physically active learning is done. Class demonstrations and field work outside of the classroom are also components to successful learning.

- Stay focused during class time by sitting near the front of the room
- Actively take notes throughout the class period
- When reading text or lengthy material, scan outline, pictures, headings and pay close attention to the first and last paragraphs to try and gain a good understanding of the information
- All or part of your senses - sight, touch, taste, smell, hearing ... should be involved when learning

These learning styles are found within educational theorist Neil Fleming’s VARK model of Student Learning. VARK is an acronym that refers to the four types of learning styles: Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing Preference, and Kinesthetic. The VARK model acknowledges that students have different approaches to how they process information, referred to as “preferred learning modes.” The main ideas of VARK are outlined in Learning Styles Again: VARKing up the right tree! (Fleming & Baume, 2006)

- Students’ preferred learning modes have significant influence on their behavior and learning.
- Students’ preferred learning modes should be matched with appropriate learning strategies.
- Information that is accessed through students’ use of their modality preferences shows an increase in their levels of comprehension, motivation and metacognition.

## Results and Discussions

**Visual learners.** Visual learners absorb information best when they can visualize relationships and ideas. Maps, charts, diagrams and even essays work well for visual learners.

**Auditory learners.** Auditory learners are all ears. They tend to prefer listening to information rather than reading it or seeing it visually displayed. Auditory learners may speak and read slowly. They tend to be linear thinkers and may repeat things they hear out loud. When it comes to studying, an auditory learner might remember material best if they talk about it with someone else, since it will be easier to recall a conversation than a visual image of words on a page.

**Kinesthetic learners.** Kinesthetic learners are the most hands-on learning type. They learn best by doing and may get fidgety if forced to sit for long periods of time. Kinesthetic learners do best when they can participate in activities or solve problems in a hands-on manner. Sometimes even being physically engaged (tossing a ball, knitting) will help them retain information better. They tend to remember what they do best.

Four basic learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile) are provided in Duet (2009) Visual learners like to learn new information by seeing it. Showing pictures or charts and writing important information on the blackboard will help visual learners practice and remember new ideas and information. Auditory learners like to learn new information by hearing it. Short lectures, hearing the information in a song or asking students to repeat information aloud will help auditory learners remember new things. Kinesthetic learners prefer to learn new things by moving or doing. You can help your kinesthetic students by asking them to act (talking with a friend in the bazaar). Tactile learners like to learn new information by touching or holding things. You can teach students who are tactile learners by giving them objects (a blue paper, a red paper, a shoe and a sock), writing vocabulary words on a card for them to study, or giving them instructions written on a card.

## Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that identifying our students as visual, auditory, reading/writing or kinesthetic learners, and aligning the overall curriculum with these learning styles, will prove to be beneficial for our entire classroom. Allowing students to access information in terms they are comfortable with will increase their academic confidence.

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