

Your Guide to Understanding and Adapting To Different Learning Styles

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When it comes to education, everyone learns exactly the same way, right? Not quite.

While the terms "auditory" and "visual" learners have become somewhat more common, there are many other types of learners.

While most people cross the lines of learning styles and can benefit from many types of learning, most people have a dominant learning style that helps them grasp and remember concepts more easily.

Understanding and adapting to the different learning styles is crucial for anyone involved in any form of instruction, whether that's teaching in a classroom, parenting, leading a Boy Scout troop or teaching Sunday School.

What are the Different Types of Learners?



Visual, aural, verbal (reading/writing) and kinesthetic are the most common categories that people use to define learning styles. One theory called "VARK" (an acronym for the four types), claims that most individuals can fall into one of those four categories of learning. VARK was first put forward by Neil Fleming, a New Zealander, in 1987.

In this article, we will also cover logical, social, solitary and naturalistic as they offer additional insight into the way that people learn.

Visual

Visual is the most common type of learning style. This type of learning includes a predisposition toward images, colors, graphs, pictures, maps, etc. In other words, they want something they can feast their eyes on.

Strengths of Visual Learners

Visual learners can also be very good with spatial thinking and recalling images or places in their minds. Visual learners excel at being detail-oriented because they notice very small changes in their surroundings. They also tend to do well with balance and alignment.

How to Connect With a Visual Learner in the Classroom

Typically, a classroom is already geared toward visual learners. PowerPoints, writing on a whiteboard, maps, graphs, posters, pictures and many other visual aids are typical in a learning environment.

This makes sense since visual learners account for up to 65% of the population, according to Social Science Research Network.

Visual learners need text or long speeches mixed with something they can see. If they are watching a presentation, a PowerPoint with graphs and images would greatly help them receive the information and remember it later.

When it comes to listening or reading, visual learners do better if the speaker or text includes imagery that they can imagine. If they can visualize what a speaker is talking about, they can better retain that knowledge.

Auditory (Aural)



Aural learners love music and sounds of all kinds, but especially interesting ones like rhymes, rhythms and the spoken word. Auditory learners retain knowledge best through hearing information rather than seeing it.

Strengths of Auditory Learners

Auditory learners are very good at repeating information back once they've heard it. They tend to be good at noticing people's inflection and tone or subtle changes in their language. Auditory learners are good at picking up language, verbal communication and retaining long lectures. They can also be fantastic storytellers.

How to Connect With an Auditory Learner in the Classroom

According to some studies, auditory learners make up for about 30% of learners. While this isn't as many students as visual, it still accounts for a large percentage of the population.

In the classroom, auditory learners benefit from things like lectures, music and speeches. They would be the type of person who could learn from a podcast and put what they've learned into action.

When giving class assignments, auditory learners will often do better hearing the assignment rather than seeing it on paper. They will also benefit from having an oral exam as opposed to a written one. Another strategy for auditory learners is to have them repeat back information to the teacher as often as possible as opposed to always writing information down. An auditory learner may not take as many notes as their visual peers.

Verbal (Reading, Writing)



People who excel at the verbal part of learning differ from visual learners because they are not discouraged by long texts. Verbal learners love language, whether written or spoken.

Strengths of Verbal Learners

People who are verbal learners are very good at absorbing information through the written word. They can take in vast amounts of complex written words and condense it into more easily digestible information.

How to Connect with a Verbal Learner in the Classroom

It isn't as clear how many students fall into the verbal learner category. Previously, the VARK study only included three categories: Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic. They later included reading and writing as a separate category.

Verbal learners do very well with a lecture and note-taking types of teaching and they also excel at writing assignments and written tests.

A good strategy for verbal learners is to have them rewrite information into their own words. They do very well at research writing projects or writing projects in general. To help them with new concepts, it's a good idea to include a written handout for them to review.

People in this category can also greatly benefit from the exuberant amount of information available on the internet. A verbal learner can easily pick up a lot of information quickly.

Kinesthetic (Physical)

A kinesthetic learner is a person who learns through physical action. They learn through making something. They prefer tactile learning and hands-on practical experience.

Strengths of a Kinesthetic Learner

Kinesthetic learners are good at picking up skills through active participation. They tend to be coordinated and do well at activities like building, sports, art or drama. They also are adept at learning by watching someone else. They're likely to have great motor skills and hand-eye coordination.

How to Connect to a Kinesthetic Learner in the Classroom

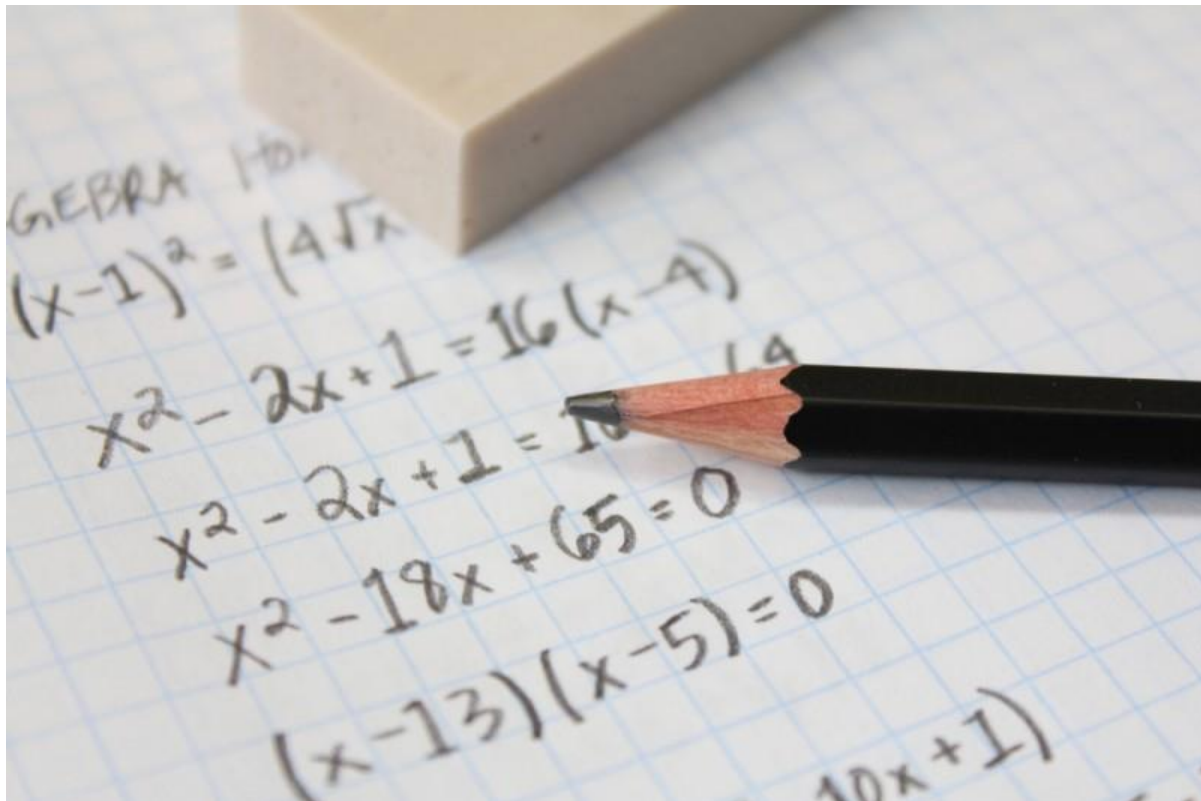
Kinesthetic learners reportedly make up about only 5% of the population. Therefore, many classroom environments are not geared toward kinesthetic learning. A student who responds to this type of learning style can come across as antsy and inattentive in the classroom. They may struggle to sit during long lectures or engaging in too much written or verbal learning.

Kinesthetic learners do best when they can physically get their hands on something or move in some way. Kinesthetic learners can be given some leeway to doodle or move a little so long as it is not disruptive to the class. It can be beneficial to have them be a helper in class with things like handing out assignments.

Mix up your class structure by breaking up lectures and sitting periods with physical movement. For younger learners, you can incorporate letters and numbers with movements and songs to get them learning while moving.

Another strategy is to use hands-on experiences to teach them something. Science is a great field for this because experiments and nature observation can be incorporated comfortably into the learning schedule.

Logical



People in the logical category are problem solvers. They see things in the realm of cause and effect. They like knowing that if A is true, B must follow. People with this learning style enjoy mathematical equations because math problems follow a logical flow. They also like patterns and logic problems.

Strengths of Logical Learners

Logical learners are excellent at seeing how things are interconnected. They can understand complex patterns, math problems, and excel at strategy games like chess. Logical learners tend to be attracted to science fields like chemistry, and they're often very comfortable with technology and computer science fields as well.

How to Connect to a Logical Learner in the Classroom

Logical learners like to understand the how and why something happened. They respond well to statistics and data and other hard facts. Science and math are preferable because they offer clear answers for how someone comes to a basic conclusion about something. In other words, these fields often offer definitive answers, or at least a course of action, to get to the answer.

Logical learners do best when the classroom is very structured. They tend to struggle more with open-ended questions and assignments. To help them connect to subjects that may not fit comfortably into the logical sphere, try to incorporate things that they can connect with. For history and geography, including statistics and graphs can be helpful. Explain how countries interact with one another and the reasons there are conflicts.

For fields like art, music and literature, try to find a more logical angle. For instance, logical learners might identify with the rules of poetry like the meter or rhyming patterns. They might be able to analyze the motivation of characters in books—if this character does this, this character will respond this way. It may not be within their natural comfort zone, but over time, it may connect to their logical style.

Social (Interpersonal)

While it should be noted that any one of the six other (not solitary) learning styles can also be applied to a social learner, people within the social or interpersonal category tend to learn much better in a group atmosphere. This type of learner thrives in group projects and shines in social settings.

Strengths of a Social Learner

People in this category have strong communication skills and can pick up on verbal and nonverbal communication from the people around them. They can pick up on the emotions of other individuals and groups. In other words, social learners tend to have a high emotional IQ and may be the first to notice when someone else's demeanor has changed. Social learners gravitate toward extracurricular activities and team sports and are energized by social interactions.

How to Connect with a Social Learner in the Classroom

People who are social learners do well when they can bounce their ideas off of other people. To connect to social learners it's a good idea to include class presentations, group discussion and group projects, as they will feel most comfortable in this type of setting.

Social learners may struggle to sit quietly and absorb information during long lectures. To help with this, it may be helpful to break it up with small group discussions or ask them to repeat back information in their own words.

Solitary (Intra-personal)

While the opposite of social, a solitary learner is similar in that it can include all the other learning styles, but people in this category learn better alone.

Strengths of a Solitary Learner

Solitary learners are often self-directed, quiet and independent. These people tend to be very good at identifying and understanding their own emotions and feelings. They value learning independently and quietly.

How to Connect with a Solitary Learner in the Classroom

Solitary learners benefit from time alone to work through problems and new ideas. They do well when they're given time they can spend being introspective and working through issues.

Some strategies that work well for solitary learners is encouraging them to keep a journal, giving them projects that they can work on alone and allowing them to work independently when possible.

They are likely to respond better to writing assignments and projects as opposed to public speaking or in group projects. If group projects are necessary, they would do well to be given a section of the project that they can contribute on their own time.

Naturalistic



A naturalistic learner is similar to a kinesthetic learner in the sense that they like hands-on experience and do better with physical involvement as opposed to learning from a textbook. The key distinction between the two is that the naturalistic learner prefers to do their hands-on learning primarily outdoors.

Strengths of a Naturalistic Learner

Naturalistic learners are curious and investigative. They can take hands-on experience from nature to understand the world around them and draw conclusions about plants, animals and the environment. They tend to be very good observers and are naturally comfortable with animals.

How to Connect to a Naturalistic Learner in the Classroom (or out of it)

Naturalistic learners will do very well if they can have some time outside actually exploring nature. Gardening, nature walks, field trips and park trips are all ways to get naturalistic learners outside. Like kinesthetic learners, naturalistic learners may enjoy science as it lends itself well to outdoor exploration.

How do you engage a naturalistic learner when they can't leave the classroom? Consider bringing nature indoors. Grow plants, have a class pet or create a tiny ecosystem. If you're studying the various forms of rocks, bring in samples that they can touch.

Students who have a naturalistic learning style enjoy reporting back the information they've learned from the world. You can take this natural desire and apply it to other fields of study like writing. Have your nature-friendly student write reports about things that they are interested in like animals and the outdoors. They can also develop their reading skills by reading books related to nature.

Conclusion

All people approach learning in different ways and from different perspectives. Most people have a range of learning types that work for them but usually have a type of learning that stands out from the rest.

Since not all people are the same, it's helpful for educators to practice multiple types of learning styles in their classroom to meet students where they're at and equip them for success.