

# Using your Learning Style Effectively.

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Learning Styles | Medical Education | Learning Strategies

## Abbreviations

None

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## Introduction and Concrete

**Experience:** An individual's learning style refers to a choice in the method they process information, acquire knowledge and review content presented to them in a teaching environment (Curry, 1981). This article will discuss how to identify your learning style and top tips on how to best utilise it to optimise your learning experience.

The VARK Model is a learning theory developed by academics which are Visual, Auditory, Read/Write and Kinaesthetic respectively (Fleming and Mills, 1992). Over time literature on Pedagogy has evolved accommodating for a number of theories such as Kolb's learning style which caters towards the learner's behaviour associated with their learning, however it is argued that these learning styles overlap in modern academia (Kolb, 1984; Romanelli, Bird and Ryan, 2009).

This article was inspired by taking part in a Student Selected Component (SSC) entitled 'Bitesize Pedagogy: Evidence-Informed Medical Education'. A component of the SSC was for students to identify their learning styles using guided questionnaires, discuss their results and the impact on their learning. Some students found they had

multiple dominant learning styles, this is described as a multimodal learning approach suggested to have greater benefit than unimodal learning as those students are more likely to adapt and engage with various teaching styles (Anderson, 2016). An individual's learning style can alter how they process information and multiple studies have highlighted that ones' learning style has limited association with their academic achievement (Feeley and Biggerstaff, 2015).

For an individual to thoroughly embrace their learning style is highly dependent on their attitude and behaviour. In a learning environment factors such as peer-peer collaboration, discipline and time management can impact the learner's drive to take on multi-modal learning (Ndume, Tilya and Twaakyondo, 2008).

**Reflective Observation:** The outcome of the Learning Styles questionnaire I completed, demonstrated that I was predominantly a Visual and Read/Write learner. I recognise that these learning styles are the ways I currently learn but, in the future, I will need to embrace all learning styles to enhance my learning.

Most people have been exposed to all four modes of learning styles during their education from school up to higher education. The question lies in whether they can recognise this and the impact it has on their learning.

I observed and spoke to my peers, 1<sup>st</sup> year medical students, about their

learning and how they think being at medical school has impacted their learning style. I found the majority of my peers were visual learners; they used flashcards to recall information, a method known to aid knowledge retention in short periods of time (Wissman, Rawson and Pyc, 2012). I also found during my observation that many peers emulated what others were doing which may or may not match their learning style. This is why it is important to recognise your own learning style so you can make the most out of it then adapt in future learning opportunities.

At my medical school, conducive learning is promoted in teaching modes such as seminars and TBL (team-based learning). These teaching modes allow students to enhance their learning by embracing the other learning styles of their peers (Seyal and Rahman, 2015).

**Top Tips for your Learning Style:** It is debated in pedagogy literature as to whether *teaching mode to learning style* mismatch, results in failure or success; what determines the outcome is the learner's ability to adapt their learning (Hamza *et al.*, 2018). Learners who have a multimodal approach and utilise their other modes have the greatest chance of thriving since learning styles are not fixed to one method of processing (Anderson, 2016). Try out these top tips for your learning style but first take the quiz below!

**Example Learning Style Quiz (if this becomes unavailable, search for an alternative online):**

Link to Learning Style Quiz:

<http://www.educationplanner.org/students/self-assessments/learning-styles.shtml>

(Accessed: 24 May 2023)

### Generic Top Tips for Learners:

- Think of your learning style as your signature, you will still use other formats of your name in different contexts – this is an example of multimodal learning (Marsh, 2004)
- It is important to understand your own learning style so you can optimise your learning in different teaching modes (Seyal and Rahman, 2015)
- Diagnosing your learning style is an element of critical thinking, this meta-cognition can improve academic performance (Biggs, 1988)

### Top Tips for Kinaesthetic Learners:

- Pre session: Use your fingers to countdown information to review (Laskey and Gibson, 1997)
- In session: If permitted try chewing gum or tapping your foot in a pace when understanding new concepts (Laskey and Gibson, 1997)
- Post session: Try acting out your notes using body movements to illustrate processes (Prodigy, 2020)

### Top Tips for Read/Write Learners:

- Pre session: Engage with pre-session activities that involve reading materials (Anderson,

2016)

- In session: Create notes in digestible chunks such as bullet points separated by subheadings (Laskey and Gibson, 1997)
- Post session: Create flow diagrams of processes or concepts to show their relationship (Prodigy, 2020).

### Top Tips for Auditory Learners:

- Pre session: Engage with pre-session activities that involve listening to podcasts or audio transcripts of lecture materials (Anderson, 2016)
- In session: If permitted, take part in class discussion with peers to consolidate your learning (Laskey and Gibson, 1997)
- Post session: Create short songs to well-known tunes about your topics (Prodigy, 2020)

### Top Tips for Visual Learners:

- Pre session: Engage with pre-session activities that involve video materials with diagrams (Anderson, 2016)
- In session: Take notes with associated colours to recall information by categories e.g., Drugs in Red, Systems in Blue
- Post session: Make your own illustrations to represent new concepts (Prodigy, 2020)

## Top Tips for embracing multi-modal learning:

- Be positive about learning in different ways
- Be prepared to recognise and embrace multiple learning styles
- Give and receive support from your peers



Image Source: <https://www.academyofmine.com/what-is-multimodal-learning-why-you-should-use-it-in-elearning/>

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