

Learning Styles

Learning is important! Learning is a process which combines action and reflection. There are many things that students can do in order to make themselves better learners. The first thing to do is to gain a good understanding of how you learn so that you can maximize your strengths, then adapt existing strategies and develop new strategies for yourself. One of the ways that you can maximize your learning is by becoming aware of your learning style(s). Some students will have one learning style which is most dominant for them while others will have more than one area of strength. You will also find that you may utilize one learning style in a particular learning setting while using a different one in another type of learning environment.

Understanding Learning Preferences

There are many different theories relating to learning styles. The styles described here will use the three categories of **visual**, **auditory**, and **kinesthetic**. For example, you may rely more on your visual skills in a course making extensive use of graphs, but use your kinesthetic strengths in a laboratory setting. Each will be described below and will include suggestions to help you maximize your use of that modality.

Auditory Preferences

Students who prefer the auditory modality of learning tend to learn best when they initially listen to verbal instructions or information presented through lectures, discussions, or audio recordings. Students with this preference learn best from:

- Spoken directions (i.e. "Tell me how to do it.")
- Discussion groups
- Reading text material aloud
- Taped textbooks and lectures
- Reciting material to help you to remember
- Teaching yourself through talking aloud as though instructing
- Studying with a friend, discussing material aloud and teaching each other
- Tape record study notes so that you can listen to them while travelling to and from school or while exercising.

To strengthen auditory learning, it's important to pick a location in the classroom where you can best hear the instructor and focus your attention, while trying to concentrate on what is being said. It can be helpful to learn how to take brief notes of the lecture and important content. Notes can be expanded on at a later date.

Visual Preferences

Students who prefer the visual modality of learning can recall better what they have observed or read. They often use visual recall of what has been read. Students with a visual learning preference learn best from:

- Graphs, charts, and diagrams
- The use of colour coding and highlighting of text material
- The use of visualization of material and concepts
- Making pictorial representations of material to be learned
- Using bullets to separate ideas
- Watching videos and films
- Using time lines and mind mapping

To strengthen visual learning it is useful to learn how to effectively highlight material rather than simply marking complete sentences in a text. Reducing notes to mind maps or pictures helps you to condense your study material in a meaningful way as you have to make decisions on what is important and encourages you to look at relationships. There can be truth to the adage that "a picture is worth a thousand words." Colour and pictures can be very effective tools to reinforce learning for any student once they have effectively developed these skills. For those who do not see themselves as visual learners, developing these skills can be essential when studying in science laboratories or when taking courses that emphasize learning from maps, charts, graphs or photographs (such as an Art History course).

Kinesthetic Preferences

Kinesthetic learners are those who prefer using whole body movement and real life experiences to help them to learn. They learn most easily when they are totally involved (i.e., physically active) and prefer:

- Making models of information
- Breaking information into steps rather than trying to deal with the whole at one time
- Typing notes into your computer (assuming you have time and are a fairly fast typist)
- Writing facts or spelling words repeatedly
- Exercising while studying as movement helps reinforce learning
- Using rhythm to help with memorization
- Making flash cards to record information for review
- Underlining or taking notes while reading

To strengthen kinesthetic learning it is useful to sit at the front of the class to help you to stay focused. Kinesthetic learning can be enhanced if you take notes (active learning) while listening to a lecture (a more passive form of learning). Class presentations, skits, laboratory practice, and playing musical instruments utilize kinesthetic learning skills. Studying with a couple of other students can be helpful as it gives you the opportunity to teach the material to each other through the use of materials, actions and discussion.

Adapting Your Learning Style

Learning is an active process. Students continually make decisions about and adapt their learning strategies to match the learning environment. Developing strengths in auditory learning will be important when in a lecture situation while kinesthetic and visual learning skills will be more beneficial in a laboratory setting — remembering that you may also have to comprehend and act upon verbal instructions. The more effective you are at developing all of the sensory modalities, the more flexible you will be as a learner.

You will also find that, from time to time, you will want to modify the format of material to suit your style. Therefore, if material is presented in an auditory modality (i.e., through a lecture presentation) you, as a more visual learner, will want to produce pictures, graphs or some other visual representation of what is being said in order to help you to retain the information. For material that is presented visually, an auditory learner may benefit from talking their way through the material, explaining concepts to him/herself. The objective is to find the means that best helps you to learn the material through adaptation and development of techniques unique to your preferred style.

Resources Available at the Academic Advising & Career Centre and on Campus

- *Study Skills Seminars* help you to understand how you best learn, how to effectively record lecture and text material to maximize your learning, as well as how best to prepare for your tests and examinations.
- Study Skills Peer Counselling appointments are available. These trained peer counsellors can help you to enhance your current learning style and can help you to develop new and effective learning strategies as well as assist you with a broad range of study skills strategies including time management and test preparation/writing.
- *Library Services and Research Skills Instruction* assists learners in acquiring knowledge by providing reference assistance to students engaged in the research process through one-on-one tutorials and through various workshops.
- The *Writing Centre* instructors assist students from across the disciplines in all aspects of the writing process, from developing outlines to advanced editing techniques. University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) has an *English Language Development (ELD) Support Service*, an extension of the current *Writing Centre* services, to guide learners towards faster acculturation into the academic community at UTSC.
- The staff of *AccessAbility Services* has the expertise to help students with various disabilities to capitalize on their learning strengths in order to be effective learners in the classroom as well in the test/exam situation.
- The *Math and Stats Help Centre* offers seminars, workshops and individual tutoring for students undertaking a Mathematics or Statistics program at UTSC, or who are taking another program of study that requires mathematics, statistics or other data interpretation courses.
- Presentation skills Instruction is available through the *Teaching and Learning Services* to UTSC students who are required to give course presentations. Workshops and appointments can be scheduled during or out-of-class time.