

# Learning Skills Services Student Development Centre

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## Learning Styles & Preferences

Have you ever wondered why you have difficulty learning from a particular instructor, whereas another seems to explain things in just the right way? Did you ever question why the course that your friend said was so easy turned into a struggle for you? Do you notice that you and your roommate have different opinions on whether or not to have the radio on while you're studying? The reason behind some of these discrepancies may be differences in learning styles.

### What is a "learning style"?

To put it simply, your learning style (or learning preference) is the way you tend to learn best. It involves your preferred method of taking in, organizing, and making sense of information. Learning styles do not tell us about a person's abilities or intelligence, but they can help us understand why some tasks seem easier for us than others. There are several benefits of thinking about and trying to understand your learning preferences:

- people learn most effectively when the strategies used are closely matched with their preferred learning style
- sometimes we can improve our learning by knowing what our strengths are and then doing more of what we're good at
- often we can improve our learning by knowing what our weaknesses are and trying to enhance our skills in these areas
- different situations and learning environments require different learning strategies, so it's best to have a large repertoire from which to draw

## Expanding Your Learning Preferences

There are 3 learning style preferences discussed here:

1. auditory (learning by hearing)
2. visual (learning by seeing)
3. kinesthetic (learning by doing)

The ideas are not meant to be the absolute best strategy for each student in all situations. Rather, if you're looking to improve your effectiveness as a student, choose the learning preference category that you feel best matches the way you like to learn (e.g. visually), and check to see if you follow the suggested strategies (e.g. enhancing visual learning). Then, look at the strategies for the other two learning styles, and try to implement some of these ideas into your repertoire as well.



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## Enhancing Auditory Learning (Learning By Hearing)

### Lecture Learning

- listen to instructions and information given orally
- sit towards the front of the room so you can hear well and so that you won't be distracted by the noises other students make
- sit away from doors, windows, and other sources of noise
- repeat information silently to yourself
- "subvocalize" as you take notes - repeat information to yourself as a quiet "mumble" that's barely audible

### Text Learning

- rehearse/repeat information either silently in your head, or out loud
- study with a partner and take turns reading to each other - discuss key concepts
- work in quiet areas to minimize hearing music, television or other distractions
- if you prefer to study with music playing, choose something with no lyrics, and keep the volume low
- use rhymes or jingles to help remember important points
- talk to yourself about textbook diagrams and illustrations
- ensure you understand by creating verbal descriptions
- tape yourself summarizing key points, then play the tape as a memory rehearsal strategy
- try to remember important terminology by thinking about how parts of the words sound
- read instructions and questions out loud to yourself (or subvocalize in test situations)

## Enhancing Visual Learning (Learning By Seeing)

### Lecture Learning

- watch for key words written on transparencies, PowerPoint slides, or the board to help organize notes
- sit towards the front of the room
- choose a location where you can see the instructor and all visual aids well
- sit away from doors, windows, bulletin boards, and other potential distractions
- try to listen and write down what you hear; fill in your notes and check for understanding after each class
- if confused about a detail, ask the instructor for clarification, write down what she/he says, then review later to ensure you understand
- use visuals like symbols and colour in notes to help flag new concepts and key ideas
- ask the instructor if other visual information is available (e.g. course web site, lecture outline)
- complete readings before lectures

### Text Learning

- minimize visual distractions in your study space (e.g. cover your computer screen, do not sit facing a window)
- make an outline of key topics in chart or diagram format
- make pictures in your mind
- use the Cornell note-taking system - include a left margin with key words
- look for sketches, diagrams, or charts to help interpret information - practice re-drawing them to help remember
- write down problems and/or questions and practice writing solutions and/or responses
- use flash cards to help rehearse
- try to remember important terminology by looking for parts of the word you already know
- make notes colourful
- highlight notes so all information relating to one topic is in the same colour category
- draw boxes or circles around terms/concepts and draw lines or arrows to show how they are related to one another
- learn when and how to translate text into charts, graphs, or pictures, such as make a time-line from dates, or draw percentages or statistical information in a pie chart

## Enhancing Kinesthetic Learning (Learning By Doing)

### Lecture Learning

- ask questions and participate in discussions whenever possible
- question the relevance and applicability to the course, yourself, and life in general
- take a small object (e.g. stress-ball) to class to play with in one hand while the other takes notes
- consider using a lap-top to take notes (for some courses with a lot of equations, graphs, and diagrams, such as math and chemistry, a lap top may not be practical)
- consider choosing course sections offering 3 one-hour segments rather than 1 three-hour segment when possible
- use class breaks to stand up and stretch

### Text Learning

- do something physical before sitting down to read or study
- highlight, underline, or take notes
- use your fingers or a piece of paper to help keep track of where you are
- break reading tasks into small chunks
- stop after each chunk, think about what you learned, and write a brief summary
- personalize the information - think about how the concepts apply to you or other people you know
- think about how you can use the information outside the classroom or course
- take regular, brief breaks to move around
- use the discussion or practice questions in the textbook or study guide to help rehearse information - if none are available, make up your own questions as you study
- move a body part (e.g. swing or tap your foot), or walk around if it helps you concentrate
- write processes, etc. on cards, mix them up, then practice physically arranging them into the correct sequence
- if you typically use your hands when talking to people, try using your hands when studying and explaining concepts to yourself