

Learning Styles: Myth or Reality

Each person is different; the person who sits to your right may enjoy different things than you. This means we all learn in different ways; that's part of what makes being human so interesting. Some people understand things best when information is presented in pictures and diagrams. Others seem to understand best when they hear someone explain it out loud. And then there are people who understand the information best when they can move things around and see the information in 3D. These different approaches are often called learning styles, which often include visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning techniques. These groups are created as a result of the different ways people learn best. Here are the different ways people learn!

For visual learners, seeing is believing. They often remember where something was written on a page, or they find that a chart or diagram helps. Using colors, pictures, and symbols can help them store content in their memory. For auditory learners, sound is the key to retaining information. They may find that hearing a teacher explain something sticks better than reading it, or that talking it out with friends helps them understand in a way independent reading never could. Tone and emphasizing words and phrases can help students retain and keep note of important information better than written information. Then there are kinesthetic learners, the doers, who seem to learn while moving, building, and experiencing. For these learners, long verbal lectures or hefty textbooks can seem useless, but labs, experiments, and real-world tasks help them physically see the information and how it is applied. (Sachin Sivadas 11th) "I definitely think learning styles help with understanding. I understand best through visual learning techniques."

These learning styles are not boxes to categorize yourself in, but noticing and utilizing the techniques together can help you retain information in the most effective way. Maybe you learn a concept best by first watching a video, then talking it over with a friend, and finally trying a hands-on experiment. What category would we fall under then? When you mix styles, you give your brain multiple paths to remember and connect ideas, which is the best way to learn concepts and content.

So, the real question is, where is the science? The truth is, there isn't! We might think learning according to our learning styles helps us study, but there is no real science behind learning styles, and it is all based on practiced preferences. Researchers say that while students might prefer certain ways of learning, those preferences don't improve learning outcomes. (Sreya, 11th) "I think learning styles are definitely real, and each person learns differently, but there are other reasons for good or bad learning like the teacher and their teaching style."

Matching teaching methods to learning styles doesn't make a real difference. Experts like Cedar Riener and Daniel Willingham call learning styles one of the biggest myths in education. A major review in 2009 even said the popularity of learning styles is “striking and disturbing” because it’s not backed by credible science.

At the end of the day, learning isn't about fitting into a neat category. It's about growth and connection with yourself and the knowledge you learn. When you understand how you learn best, you give yourself the gift of time to be able to understand and retain information effectively and quickly.

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