

Spotlight on Learning Styles



“In 1979, researchers Walter Burke Barbe and Raymond H. Swassing identified different learning styles in what they called the VAK Model for Learning. They theorized that people learn in three ways: visually, auditorily or kinesthetically.”

Green, S. (2019)

VAK Learning Styles

There are many ways to learn, and we all have our own preferred approach – our learning ‘style’.

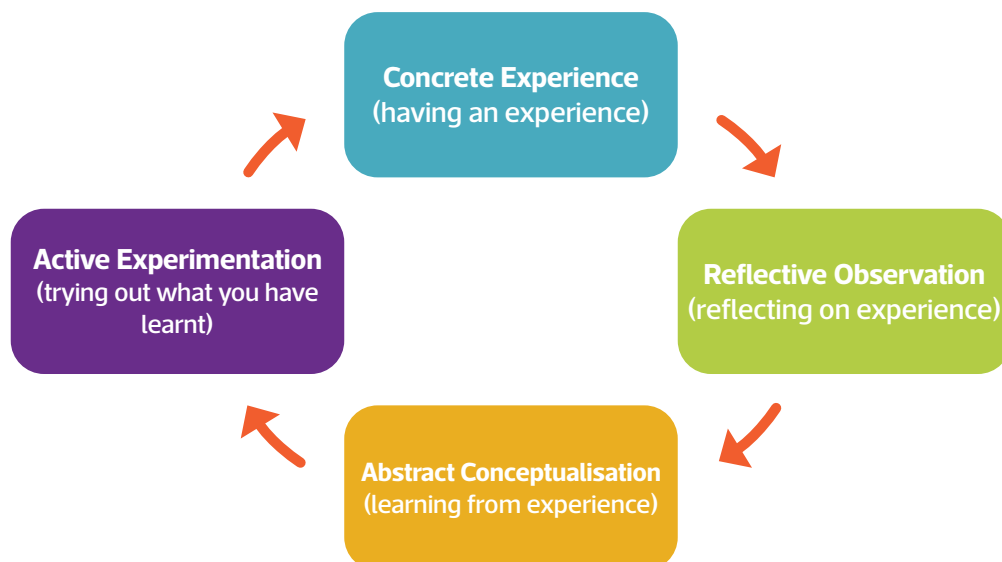
If we can identify our own personal preferences, and those of the people we work with, we can take advantage of that to optimise learning. We can also make concerted efforts to overcome any inherent weaknesses in our usual style.

Many people learn more easily visually, that is, they learn best by looking and visual aids like pictures, diagrams, PowerPoint slides, are important for these learners. Other people tend to prefer to learn aurally, learning most easily by having information imparted to them verbally, and they also like to discuss what they are learning out loud with others. Others have a kinaesthetic learning style; they learn by touching, moving and doing. Note however that your preferred learning style may not be your strongest!

Other researchers, including Kolb (1984) contend that the best way of learning anything is by experience.

Kolb Learning Styles

Kolb (1984) and others have emphasised that to learn something thoroughly by experience we need to complete a four-stage cycle:



You may have noticed that one or two of these stages look more attractive to you than others:

People who prefer learning by	Behaviour	Are more attracted to
Feeling	Getting personally involved, especially with other people	Having an experience - Concrete Experience (CE)
Watching and listening	Staying back a little from the situation	Reviewing, reflecting - Reflective Observation (RO)
Thinking	Using logic, intellectually analyse the problem or situation	Concluding, theorising - Abstract Conceptualisation (AC)
Doing	Taking a practical approach, seeing what works	Planning, trying things out - Active Experimentation (AE)

Experiencing all four stages, whichever one you start at, leads to a more complete and effective learning experience. (You can start at any stage of the Cycle, although normally you start with an experience.) Keeping a log for a while of your learning experiences will help you to identify how you personally complete (or do not complete) the cycle.

Honey and Mumford Model

Honey and Mumford (1982) describe individuals who learn best from the respective stages of Kolb's learning cycle as Activists, Reflectors, Theorists and Pragmatists, and emphasised the importance of identifying your least preferred learning stage. There are ways in which you can strengthen your learning by focusing on that weakness, and overcoming it. For example:

Stage	Type/Style	If this is where you are weakest, try the following:
CE	Activist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start a conversation with somebody Practise thinking on your feet, aloud
RO	Reflector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practise observing and describing to yourself the behaviours of other people At a meeting, summarise out loud what's happened so far At a meeting, sum up the pros and cons of any proposed course of action under discussion
AC	Theorist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Practise asking other people 'open' questions (i.e. ones they cannot answer in one word) Read a newspaper or journal article specifically looking for examples of prejudice, bias, blind spots and weak arguments Keep asking 'Why?'
AE	Pragmatist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Go for the 'good enough' option, rather than the perfect one If others do something well, model yourself on their behaviour and try it yourself Invite other people to give you feedback about the way you do or say things. Or on what you don't do or say!

References

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