

Learning Styles

Which one are you?

Popular thinking has identified four different main styles of learning. By thinking about your preferred style, you can try and apply this to learning new things. If you're able to use your natural style, you're likely to find learning much easier and quicker.

(Taken from some guidance notes produced for staff by MaST plc)

Activists:

Activists like to be involved in new experiences. They are open minded and enthusiastic about new ideas but get bored with implementation. They enjoy doing things and tend to act first and consider the implications afterwards. They like working with others but tend to hog the limelight.

Activists learn best when:

- involved in new experiences, problems and opportunities
- working with others in business games, team tasks, role-playing
- being thrown in the deep end with a difficult task
- chairing meetings, leading discussions

Activists learn less when:

- listening to lectures or long explanations
- reading, writing or thinking on their own
- absorbing and understanding data
- following precise instruction to the letter

Reflectors

Reflectors like to stand back and look at a situation from different perspectives. They like to collect data and think about it carefully before coming to any conclusions. They enjoy observing others and will listen to their views before offering their own.

Reflectors learn best when:

- observing individuals or groups at work
- they have the opportunity to review what has happened and think about what they have learned
- producing analyses and reports doing tasks without tight deadlines

Reflectors learn less when:

- acting as leader or role-playing in front of others
- doing things with no time to prepare
- being thrown in at the deep end
- being rushed or worried by deadlines

Theorists:

Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex and logically sound theories. They think problems through in a step by step way. They tend to be perfectionists who like to fit things into a rational scheme. They tend to be detached and analytical rather than subjective or emotive in their thinking.

Theorists learn best when:

- they are put in complex situations where they have to use their skills and knowledge
- they are in structured situations with clear purpose
- they are offered interesting ideas or concepts even though they are not immediately relevant
- they have the chance to question and probe ideas behind things

Theorists learn less when:

- they have to participate in situations which emphasise emotion and feelings
- the activity is unstructured or briefing is poor
- they have to do things without knowing the principles or concepts involved
- they feel they're out of tune with the other participants e.g. with people of very different learning styles

Pragmatists

Pragmatists are keen to try things out. They want concepts that can be applied to their job. They tend to be impatient with lengthy discussions and are practical and down to earth.

Pragmatists learn best when:

- there is an obvious link between the topic and job
- they have the chance to try out techniques with feedback e.g. role-playing
- they are shown techniques with obvious advantages e.g. saving time
- they are shown a model they can copy e.g. a film or a respected boss

Pragmatists learn less when:

- there is no obvious or immediate benefit that they can recognise
- there is no practice or guidelines on how to do it
- there is no apparent pay back to the learning e.g. shorter meetings
- the event or learning is 'all theory'

Most of us has elements of more than one learning style.

Think about your strongest style and your weakest style to identify how you learn best.