

# Learning Styles

A Guide to Recognizing And Honoring Your Child's Learning Style

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## Not All Children Learn The Same Way

Every parent knows that no two children are exactly alike, even if they're twins. They may have some similarities, but these siblings may be totally different. One will like music while another likes sports. One will be content to sit and work word puzzles while the other will like to make things with their hands. These differences occur in the way they learn, as well.

**Not all children learn the same way either, and teaching them equally might be doing a grave disservice to each child.**

Some children will learn more efficiently by a hands-on approach, still others will learn best by verbal instruction, some might learn best by reading. If we, as parents, can learn how our children learn best, we will greatly enhance not only the quality of their education, but possibly the enjoyment they derive from learning.

Determining which learning style your child falls under may help you understand why they have problems with scientific equations but excel in the arts. It might also help you to know best how to encourage your child in learning tasks that don't come easy for them. Most of all, discovering your child's learning style will help you reinforce skills that will be important for success in life.

### What exactly is a learning style?

Defining "learning style" isn't as difficult as determining how many learning styles there are. In fact, depending on whom you ask or which report you read there is any number of learning styles. For the purpose of this report, however, a learning style will be defined as **the sum total of individual skills and preferences that make up the way a person perceives, gathers, and processes information.**

**Learning styles affect every area of a person's life** – how they learn, whether or not they participate well in group activities, how they relate to others, how they solve problems, and the manner in which they work. Since children are different, they have their own bent in the way they learn. A learning style can also explain the different approach a person uses in order to learn effectively.

Learning styles are thought to be determined by three major pathways to learning: **visual** (sight), **kinesthetic** (movement, use of body, sensory), and **auditory** (sounds). Learning is also based on connecting perceptual pathways or three states of consciousness: conscious, subconscious, and unconscious.

**Knowing your child's learning style could help them in more than one way.** Not only could it make a difference in their actually learning a difficult subject easier, it may be that **knowing their learning style could help them to enjoy the learning process much more** than forcing them to learn to a style that is not their own.

Experts agree that learning styles are established in a child by the time they are seven years old. While it is possible for a child to strengthen one learning style over time, it is highly unlikely that their learning style will ever change entirely.

## **Children's Learning Styles**

There are two different models to be used for the purpose of this report. Both models base learning styles on visual, kinesthetic, and verbal. Ms. June Griswold's model also includes logic as a learning style where the Visual, Audio, and Kinesthetic Learning (VAK) model does not list logic as a style at all. If you would like to learn about other models for "learning styles," you may complete an online search using any search engine of your choice.

Ms. June Griswold, who taught in the classroom setting for 16 years, believed that identifying children's learning styles could greatly improve a child's learning experience. She felt that a teacher could adapt lessons in such a way that they could be taught to reach children in each style. If she was able to teach to each learning style, she could help eliminate labels that some children are given. She could also help people realize that **just because a student learns differently it does not mean that the student is learning disabled.**

Ms. Griswold studied two books by Thomas Armstrong and broke learning styles into four categories: visual (spatially oriented), kinesthetic (movement oriented), verbal (language oriented), and logical (analytically oriented).

She said children will generally have one dominant learning style, but could use a mixture of the four. If they could use each learning style, she felt they were more flexible in their learning, and would probably be successful in school. The following descriptions are based on Ms. Griswold's research.

**Visual (spatial) learner** – This type of learner needs a chance to **visualize things** and learns well through images. They will be **artistic**, reading maps, and creating charts and diagrams. They will often be very interested in **machines or inventions** and trying to figure out how something works. They will be happy to sit and play with building toys such as **Legos**, and will also enjoy mazes or puzzles. They may come across as being a daydreamer. This definitely fits the learning style of my 7 year old!

To help a visual (spatial) learner, **use games and memory aids** to create a visual pattern. While they are reading, offer picture books, or if they're reading chapter books, allow them an opportunity to visualize what is happening in a story. Encourage them to use art to illustrate a story. Use colored pens, drawing, and computer work to help them excel at writing.

When it comes to math, you might want to emphasize manipulatives more than worksheets. With my 7 year old, I often use small Lego toys to illustrate math problems he's challenged by.



**Kinesthetic (movement) learner** – This type of child will learn effectively if given the opportunity to move and be active. They are not able to sit still for long periods of time, and will use body language and hand gestures when talking. If forced to sit on their hands, a kinesthetic learner would shut down. **They need to show you how to do something** rather than explain it. They love to touch things and are often natural-born actors. They may be labeled as having attention deficit disorder, but most of the time it is not the case. Quite often a kinesthetic learner will excel in sports.

Help a kinesthetic learner by **giving them a chance to move about**. Physical action, even if it is limited, will stimulate this student and help them do their best. Allow the child to get up and move around some during class, particularly while reading. It might be a little bit disruptive, but the child will do much better than if being forced to sit still. Give them an opportunity to do **hands-on activities, art projects, or acting out a story**. Then sit back and watch the child bloom before your eyes.

**Verbal (language) learner** – This child thinks in words rather than being able to visualize something. They are naturally gifted at story telling and will have little trouble in spelling. They generally love to read and have an excellent memory of names, dates, and trivia. Quite often they are musically talented and enjoy word games.

The best way to encourage a verbal learner is to allow them to create **word problems**. Allow the child **to dictate stories while you write** or type them out. **Tape record stories** they tell and listen to them at a later date, or allow them to read stories aloud during class time.

**Logical learner** – A logical learner will enjoy patterns and relationships, seeing how things work, and may drive you to distraction with all of their questions. They are often capable of abstract thinking at an early age and will understand mathematics easily. They enjoy strategy games, computers, and loves to build.

Motivating a logical learner isn't difficult. Allow them to play computer games, do word puzzles, and help with scientific experiments. Non-fiction and rhyming books will be appreciated. When reading fiction, explain to them the relationships between the people in the stories, and how the story can relate to real-life.

### **Visual, Audio, and Kinesthetic Learning (VAK) model**

The Visual, Audio, and Kinesthetic Learning (VAK) model says there are only three types of learning styles that all people are going to fall into. This model says that everyone will fall into one of these models and that all three models can be used in a classroom to meet the needs of each style.



**Visual Learner** - The visual learner learns everything through seeing. They prefer to sit at the front of the classroom so they can easily see without obstruction. The visual student may think in pictures and will enjoy diagrams, illustrated books, videos, and hand-outs. They will generally take detailed notes during class, illustrate stories that they write, and use pictures to help them memorize facts.

**Auditory Learner** - The auditory learner will learn more easily through verbal lessons and anything that allows them to talk out what they are learning. They learn best by reading text aloud. Quite often the auditory learner will enjoy debates and discussions in class. They don't mind making presentations and may use musical jingles or mnemonics to help them memorize facts. They enjoy dictating their ideas to others and may not enjoy writing.

**Kinesthetic Learner** - The kinesthetic learner will enjoy a hands-on approach or being able to move while learning. They have a hard time sitting still for long periods of time and may become disruptive if they aren't allowed to get up quite often during the day. Boys are generally more kinesthetic in their learning style, but there are also girls in this style. They would need to take frequent breaks, will learn best by handling objects, and like to listen to music while they learn. They might also learn better if allowed to stand up rather than sit down during long lectures.

### **Why does a parent need to understand a child's learning style?**

Why is it important for a parent to understand the learning style their child falls into? The implications are rather obvious if you're a homeschooling parent. In order to teach each child effectively, with minimal frustration, you need to understand how they learn best. If you're not a homeschooling parent, this information is still very useful. Understanding your child's learning style allows you to help them when they have homework. If your child's teacher doesn't work with them in their learning style, they may have problems in school. Being armed with this information can help you work out solutions with your child's school and teachers. Knowing their learning style may help your child become interested in a new subject. You may be able to present information to your child in a way they will understand, and you will be able to help your child strengthen the learning styles that is not their own.

40% of all students fall into the visual learning style. 50% of children fall into the kinesthetic learning style and this is why they have difficulty learning in traditional school settings. The remaining 10% are auditory learners. The breakdown in learning styles is part of the reason most elementary schools combine the different learning styles in which to teach children. As students progress in grades, however, teachers will use auditory learning style in which to teach. Since only 10 percent of students are auditory learners that means the remaining 90% of students may have difficulty learning in the higher grades.

## How do you determine your child's learning style?

Reading through the descriptions, your child may jump out at you! But if you aren't sure, try these tips:

Ask your child what they think of when someone says the word "dog." If they are a visual learner, they will most likely develop a picture in their mind of a familiar dog, such as a pet or they will spell out the letters d-o-g. If your child is an auditory learner, they may describe a bark. If they describe the feel of the dog's fur, they are most likely kinesthetic learners.



When learning a group of new spelling words, this is how you might help each type of learner: Visual learners will not be able to visualize the spoken word, so you might need to write the word out onto a white board while it is being spelled aloud. This tactic might help a visual learner learn more easily. The kinesthetic learner might remember the new spelling word by spelling them out with blocks or being given a crossword puzzle with the new words in it. Auditory learners are most likely going to learn new spelling words phonetically or by creating a poem or song they could sing to learn to spell.

## Is your child is having problems learning at school?

There are a number of options you may have to pursue. First, talk with your student's teacher to see what method of teaching they use. If they teach using strictly lectures, rarely using overhead projections or worksheets, your visual learner may have problems as well as any student who learns kinesthetically. Try to find ways that you can present the information at home so your child may more easily understand and learn the subject matter.

If your child is failing in a number of subjects, it might be time to consider whether you should continue to work with your child at home and hope that your help will ensure success, you can pay to have your child tutored, or you can take your child out of the public school system and home school them.

Public schools are not set up to deal with each learning style all at the same time, therefore some children may suffer.

One benefit to home schooling, if you are able to do so, is that you can cater more to your child's learning style, which might give them the educational success they may not have had so far.

Of course, home schooling isn't for every family, just like teaching entirely by lecture isn't for every child. The options for home schooling are varied, however, and will give your child many opportunities they will not get in traditional schools. Through home schooling, you may be able to tap into your child's learning style and see an entirely different student emerge.

Instead of using a traditional curriculum, you can use lapbooks and art projects which will cater more to the kinesthetic learner because they'll be using manipulatives in the learning process. If your child is an auditory learner, you can download history stories off the internet to help them learn. If your child is a visual learner, traditional books and workbooks might be best.

You can also allow them to learn at their own pace instead of having to remain at the pace the teacher sets. If your child is a quick learner, and has been frustrated by how slow public school classes are taught, home schooling may be the answer. If they have had problems because the teacher has covered a subject too quickly, home schooling will give you the opportunity to teach them at a pace in which they can learn the subject matter.

### **More ideas for determining which learning style your child has**

One of the best resources for discovering your child's learning style is a book most home school parents are aware of. The book, [The Way They Learn](#) by Cynthia Tobias, has helped countless home school families find their children's learning styles and then build success upon success by encouraging their children to learn in the way that suits them best.

If you would prefer to work entirely online, there are a number of assessments and tests that you can give to determine which learning style your child has. Running an online search for "learning style tests" may turn up some of the following:

- **Multiple-Intelligences Test**  
This is a series of short tests that breaks down the way your child acts or reacts on a number of different levels. These "intelligences" show your child's giftings or where their talents lie.

They may help you to see where your child has strengths and weaknesses you're unaware of, and help you to work with your child to improve those areas where they may be weak while giving you the opportunity to encourage those areas where they are strong.

- **The Index of Learning Styles**

This is a free, online test that is used to determine if your child is active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, or sequential/global. It was developed by Richard M. Felder and Linda K. Silverman. Access it here: <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>

- **Learning Styles Online**

This website has a free Memletics learning style inventory online that will test your child to determine their learning style based on seven components – visual, aural, verbal, physical, logical, social, and solitary. Visit it here: <http://www.learning-styles-online.com/>

You may also find additional information about both Ms. June Griswold and the VAK model through online searches.

While these inventories and tests are not exhaustive, it will give you an idea of what types of tests are available to help you understand your child better. Discovering their learning style, whether they remain in the public school system or you decide to home school them, may make all the difference in the way they learn and their enjoyment of the subjects they learn.

### **Should a parent try to encourage a child's learning style?**

If you would like your child to succeed at school, the obvious answer is "yes" you should try to encourage a child's learning style and even cater to it if at all possible. Not only will you enable your child to learn in a way that they are most comfortable, but fostering their unique learning style will also help them to retain the information they do learn.

How would a parent go about fostering a child's learning style, though? And if it were so important, why don't schools do this to ensure successful students?

The best way to foster a child's learning style is first determine how your child learns best. Then you can create ways to help your child learn based on the style they learn most effectively with.

For example, if your child is a kinesthetic, spit-fire, always-on-the-go type of child, having them sit at a desk with a math text book will be torture. However, if **you incorporate movement into their learning**, they are going to learn the subject quicker and probably retain things much better. Perhaps you can have them clap out a rhythm when you teach them their multiplication tables. At the very least, letting them get up and walk around, clap or bounce a ball while doing their work will help.

Using the kinesthetic learner, here's how you might be able to incorporate movement into mathematics. If you're learning to multiply 2's, you can toss a ball back and forth, starting with  $1 \times 2$ , the child would say 2 and toss the ball back to you. You would say another multiplication problem and then toss the ball to the child. They'd answer and toss it back to you. In this way, they are moving and learning to multiply at the same time. This method might also work with spelling, where you take turns spelling a word, one letter at a time.

The major benefit of teaching to a learning style is that the child is actually the one who wins. Instead of your child being forced to sit still, or possibly be subjected to taking attention deficit disorder drugs to calm them down during school hours, home schooling would enable a kinesthetic child to learn and thrive.

Home schooling can also be of benefit to children in the other learning styles. **A verbal learner may prefer to read and learn for themselves** instead of listen to someone else tell them what they should learn. This child may prefer to learn to spell by playing Scrabble or Boggle, which is highly unlikely to happen in the public school setting.

An auditory learner may not balk at having to listen to lectures, but they may retain what they learn better if they are allowed to watch a television program about a certain time in history. They can then create a report about what they've learned. Instead of having an auditory learner write out spelling words, why not allow them to spell them out loud to you? To teach multiplication, try having an auditory learner memorize "School House Rock" songs.

How often is a child permitted to listen to music while in school? Research has proven in the last 10 years that children retain more mathematics if there is classical music playing softly in the background. Teachers rarely use this method to help their students learn, though. Instead, teachers prefer the room to be quiet except for their own voices. How much more would children learn if they were given the choice of having music playing while they learn?

Teachers are now beginning to modify their teaching to allow for the different learning styles, but quite often they don't succeed. Instead, children that learn differently are labeled as learning disabled, which is an injustice to the student. If a parent knows their child's learning style, they may be able to help them learn to their learning style, and remove the stigma of that label.

Parents need to support their school's efforts at incorporating more methods of teaching than just lectures. However, where the school may still fail, the parent can pick up the pieces and help their child to learn, especially if they understand their child's learning style.

It's true that children are all individuals and that they don't all learn alike. If not all children learn equally it would seem the best tactic would be to discover how they learn and then teach them to their learning style. Give them the skills to excel, not only in school, but in life as well.

**More Resources:**

[The Way They Learn by Cynthia Tobias](#)

[Making Math Fun](#) – a collection of math board games, card games and more to teach your child math. This one would be great for visual, audio and kinesthetic learners.

[Robot Reader Reading and Phonics Games](#) - full color reading and phonics games to print directly from your computer - board games, card games, bingo games, and more.