

People Learn with a Purpose

Understanding Learning Styles

Janet H. Johnson, Allen County Extension—Family and Consumer Sciences

People are motivated to learn for different purposes. They may see that a better understanding of facts will help them make better decisions for reaching a set goal. Some may just love the fun or social aspect of the learning process or group activity and find the content less important. Others may not really have a learning goal but have a strong interest in increasing knowledge though the content discussed. Regardless of the purpose, you *must* maintain interest and feel engaged for your learning to be successful. Understanding why and how you—or your learners, if you are leading a group—learn best is the key to a positive learning experience.

Learning Is Emotional

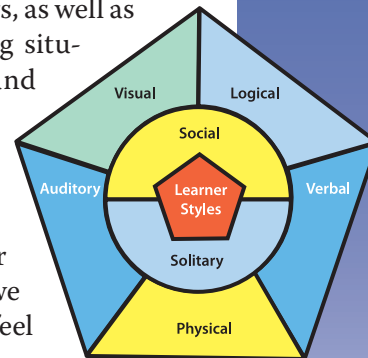
Learning may be based on need, but the motivation to learn is governed by emotions. With each learning action, we can experience joy, frustration, anger, defeat or boredom. These feelings influence us to either continue or stop the learning process. For example, a student with a speech problem may experience embarrassment and a feeling of failure when asked to read aloud in a group class and may stop coming to events. The same group events may engender enthusiasm and joy in a strong reader who enjoys the interaction of the group. People will seek to emotionally preserve

themselves first and foremost, regardless of how much they need or want to learn.

Our culture and physical environment also affect our motivation to learn. We adopt our beliefs about learning from family, friends and communities. Our learning choices are distinctly related to gender and age expectations, family roles, and cultural traditions. For example, if a young person’s family does not feel that it is a woman’s “place” to speak up in a group, his or her beliefs regarding certain group learning experiences may be impacted in a negative way. Social beliefs may strongly influence how individuals react to selected learning activities and whether they experience positive emotions for successful learning.

Personal Learning Styles

The positive emotions that motivate learning are directly related to personal learning styles. All learners, as well as those facilitating learning situations, need to understand that individuals process information in different ways to find meaning. When learning activities are designed to fit our preferred learning styles, we will react positively and feel successful.





I am always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught.

—Winston Churchill

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Following are examples of common learning styles. Which relate best and appeal the most to you?

- **Auditory/musical**—You prefer using sound and music. Auditory learners process information for meaning through sounds and will say, “Tell me, let me listen to what you mean.”
- **Logical/mathematical**—You prefer using logic, reasoning and systems. Logical learners process information using numbers, data and problem solving with specific reasoning and detailed processes and will say, “Let me use the data to show what I mean.”
- **Physical/kinesthetic**—You prefer using your body, hands and sense of touch. Physical learners process information for meaning through touch and actual use of content with interactive demonstrations and will say, “Let me try this to show what I mean.”
- **Social/interpersonal**—You prefer to learn in groups or with other people. Social learners love to talk and work with others for best learning and accomplishment and will say, “Let’s meet face-to-face and brainstorm solutions.”
- **Solitary/intrapersonal**—You prefer to work alone and use self-study. Solitary learners love to silently think about what they are learning and process for meaning alone and will say, “Let me think about this and get back to you with ideas.”
- **Verbal/linguistic**—You prefer using words, both in speech and writing. Verbal learners process information for meaning through language, either talking or writing with words and will say, “Let me tell you what I’ve learned.”
- **Visual/spatial**—You prefer using pictures, images and spatial understanding. Visual learners process information for meaning with illustrations and diagrams and will say, “Show me what you mean.”

Enhancing Meaning in Learning Activities

Why are you often bored in a learning environment? Have you ever found yourself leading a training situation for seemingly apathetic listeners with bored stares? We learn when we are interested in (engaged with) the information and find possible meaning that indicates that the information can be useful in our lives. Focusing and sustaining interest is critical to a successful learning situation. Effective presenters use movement among learners during instruction, as well as gestures, smiles and body animation to show energy and friendliness. Good presenters also design learning activities that will help learners think and connect what they already know to new content for new meaning. Here are some preferred activities and ways to assess learning for selected learning styles:

- **Auditory/musical**—To reach an auditory learner, lecture, discuss instructions and musical performances to make points; ask them to create an expressive song, use music videos, songs/lyrics with CDs, online video, radio, television to express ideas.
- **Logical/mathematical**—To reach a logical learner, use problem-solving situations involving formulas and equations; ask for the development of flow charts, cost benefit analysis, timelines, logic models, word puzzles, recipes, numbers and measurements.
- **Physical/kinesthetic**—To reach a physical learner, use high touch and movement found in physical “hands-on” or movement activities such as dance, arts and crafts, building projects, role play, active games, scavenger hunts, foods tasting, experiments; ask them to create arts and crafts projects, conduct puppet shows, go on scavenger hunts, create role play, use games for demonstrations.

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- **Social/interpersonal**—To reach a social learner, plan teamwork projects, group activities, interviews, committee assignments, and include social aspects and relationship building opportunities with learning situations such as service projects; ask learners to do group presentations, develop a community project.
- **Solitary/intrapersonal**—To reach a solitary learner, plan internet research and other technology activities such as electronic discussions, personal writing projects, blogs, reading assignments and personal interpretations such as artwork. Ask learners to keep a reflective journal, create personal philosophy, and explain hunches.
- **Verbal/linguistic**—To reach a verbal learner, hold group discussions, use personal demonstrations; ask for speeches, debates, essays, telling or writing poetry and stories, papers, journaling and other writing experiences.
- **Visual/spatial**—To reach a visual learner, show PowerPoint slides, hold up a picture, conduct a demonstration, or use a graph to make a point; ask for creation of posters, photo albums, scrapbooks, charts, or scale models.

Summary

People learn with a purpose! Those purposes are enhanced when learning takes place in an environment that brings out positive emotions and joy in learning. Designing learning activities with different learning styles in mind creates an atmosphere in which participants react positively and feel successful while acquiring knowledge to improve the quality of their lives.

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