Understanding Learning Styles

People learn in different ways. Some learn best by seeing, others by hearing, and still others by touching. Knowing our preferred learning style helps us learn and remember new things.

It’s commonly believed that there are three basic learning preferences or styles:

- **Auditory** (hearing information)
- **Visual** (seeing information)
- **Kinesthetic-Tactile** (touching, participation)

Knowing your child's best way to learn can be a real help in learning more effectively. People usually teach in their preferred learning style, which may be different from the preferred style of the learner. This can be frustrating for both the person trying to share information and the person trying to receive it. For example, imagine that you are a strong auditory learner and try to verbally explain the rules of baseball to someone who is more visual and really has to see the various moves in a diagram.

Even though we have a preferred learning style, we can still learn in other ways. People have varying degrees of preference—some are highly auditory, some are highly visual, some are highly kinesthetic-tactile (k-t), while others seem to be able to learn equally well in all three styles.

At any age, people learn more easily using their preferred learning style, but this doesn't mean we can't and won't learn any other way. In fact, we should be encouraged to use and improve all modes of learning. The more senses we use to learn about anything, the more information we get.

A good guideline is to encourage people to use their preferred style when learning essential information (e.g., road safety) and to practise using other learning modes for things that are not as important (e.g., words to songs you sing on car trips). The auditory learner will enjoy listening to tape-recorded songs; the visual learner will enjoy reading the words as he hears them sung; the k-t learner will enjoy dancing or acting as the music conductor.

Young children are generally all kinesthetic-tactile learners. Watch your baby put everything in her mouth and your toddler reach out to touch and explore his world. Visual and auditory preferences may emerge later.

Schools have traditionally used visual and auditory teaching styles, especially in the upper grades. Children who learn easily through these modes are usually successful in school, while k-t learners often find school difficult. Most of us—not only young children—learn better if we are actively involved in our own learning.

As we mature, we are better able to understand and facilitate our own lifelong learning. For example, a visual learner who must remember information given at a lecture (auditory model), will know that she needs to take notes, make sketches or read a book on the topic to reinforce the lecture content.

What Do You Think is Your Preferred Learning Style?

Review the learning style checklist below and find out:

Auditory learners often:

- Enjoy oral discussion
- Remember by talking out loud
- Need to have things explained orally
- Have trouble with written instructions
- Talk to themselves while learning something new
- Repeat a telephone number in order to remember it

Visual learners often:

- Remember visual details
- Prefer to see what they are learning
- Like to have paper and pens handy
- Doodle while listening
- Have trouble following lectures
- Like to write down instructions or telephone numbers

Kinesthetic-tactile learners often:

- Prefer activities
- Want to actually do whatever is being talked about or learned
- Like to move around while listening or talking
- Often "talk" with their hands
- Like to touch things in order to learn about them
- Remember things by recalling who did what rather than who said what

Though we can all benefit by knowing how we, and the people around us, prefer to learn—be it auditory, visual, or kinesthetic, it’s important to give ourselves and our children many opportunities to use all of the learning styles so that we can develop to our full potential.