

PRACTITIONER'S CORNER

Sensory Preferences and Learning Style

Although we use all five senses to collect information from our environment, they do not contribute equally to our knowledge base. Most people do not use sight, hearing, and touch equally during learning. Just as most people develop a left- or right-handed preference, they also develop preferences for certain senses as they gather information from their environment. Some people have a preference for learning by sight, for example. They are called *visual* learners. Others who use hearing as the preferred sense are known as *auditory* learners. Still others who prefer touch or whole-body involvement in their learning are called *kinesthetic* learners. Sensory (also called *modality*) preferences are an important component of an individual's learning style. Teachers need to

- **Understand** that students with different sensory preferences will behave differently during learning.
- **Recognize** that they tend to teach the way they learn. A teacher who is a strong auditory learner will prefer this modality when teaching. Students who also are strong auditory learners will feel comfortable with this teacher's methods, but visual learners can have difficulty in maintaining focus. They will doodle or look at other materials to satisfy their visual craving.
- **Note**, similarly, that students with auditory preferences want to talk about their learning and can become frustrated with teachers who use primarily visual strategies. Strong kinesthetic learners require movement while learning or they become restless—tapping their pencils, squirming in their seats, or walking around the room.
- **Avoid** misinterpreting these variations in learning style behavior as inattention or as intentional misbehavior. The variations may, in fact, represent the natural responses of learners with different and strong preferences.
- **Understand** that a teacher's own learning style and sensory preferences can affect learning and teaching. Teachers should design lessons that include activities to address all sensory preference and learning styles.

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Determining Your Sensory Preferences

This checklist indicates your sensory preference(s). It is designed for adults and is one of many that are available. You should not rely on just one checklist for self-assessment. Remember that sensory preferences are usually evident only during prolonged and complex learning tasks.

Directions: For each item, circle "A" if you **agree** that the statement describes you most of the time. Circle "D" if you **disagree** that the statement describes you most of the time. Move quickly through the questions. Your first response is usually the more accurate one.

1. I prefer reading a story rather than listening to someone tell it. A D
2. I would rather watch television than listen to the radio. A D
3. I remember names better than faces. A D
4. I like classrooms with lots of posters and pictures around the room. A D
5. The appearance of my handwriting is important to me. A D
6. I think more often in pictures. A D
7. I am distracted by visual disorder or movement. A D
8. I have difficulty remembering directions that were told to me. A D
9. I would rather watch athletic events than participate in them. A D
10. I tend to organize my thoughts by writing them down. A D
11. My facial expression is a good indicator of my emotions. A D
12. I tend to remember names better than faces. A D

13. I would enjoy taking part in dramatic events like plays. A D
14. I tend to subvocalize and think in sounds. A D
15. I am easily distracted by sounds. A D
16. I easily forget what I read unless I talk about it. A D
17. I would rather listen to the radio than watch television. A D
18. My handwriting is not very good. A D
19. When faced with a problem, I tend to talk it through. A D
20. I express my emotions verbally. A D
21. I would rather be in a group discussion than read about a topic. A D
22. I prefer talking on the phone rather than writing a letter to someone. A D
23. I would rather participate in athletic events than watch them. A D
24. I prefer going to museums where I can touch the exhibits. A D
25. My handwriting deteriorates when the space becomes smaller. A D
26. My mental pictures are usually accompanied by movement. A D
27. I like being outdoors and doing things like biking, camping, swimming, hiking, etc. A D
28. I remember best what was done rather than what was seen or talked about. A D
29. When faced with a problem, I often select the solution involving the greatest activity. A D
30. I like to make models or other hand-crafted items. A D

31. I would rather do experiments than read about them. A D
32. My body language is a good indicator of my emotions. A D
33. I have difficulty remembering verbal directions if I have not done the activity before. A D

Interpreting Your Score

Total the number of "A" responses in items 1–11: _____
This is your visual score.

Total the number of "A" responses in items 12–22: _____
This is your auditory score.

Total the number of "A" responses in items 23–33: _____
This is your tactile/kinesthetic score.

If you scored a lot higher in any one area: This sense is *very probably* your preference during a protracted and complex learning situation.

If you scored a lot lower in any one area: This sense is *not likely* to be your preference in a learning situation.

If you have similar scores in all three areas: You can learn things in almost any way they are presented.

Reflections

A. What was your preferred sense? Were you surprised?

B. How does this preference show up in your daily life?

C. How does this preference show up in your teaching?