

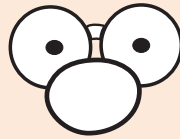
CAPITALIZING ON LEARNING STRENGTHS

For years we have heard the term “learning styles,” but what exactly are they? Do they, in fact, actually exist? There is no evidence or agreement about the answers to these questions. Those who say they exist disagree about how many learning styles there might be, and what they are. In practical terms, though, you have been learning from the time you were born. Moreover, you probably have an idea of how you learn best and most easily. In other words, you have some idea of your *learning strengths*. The tips that follow are suggestions that can help you study more efficiently and productively. Don't get hung up on labels. The important point is that you need to experiment to see which strategies tap into your learning strengths. Also, you may find it helpful to use different strategies in different courses.

The six areas of strengths presented below are visual, visual-spatial, auditory, tactile-kinesthetic, and analytical/ sequential, and global/intuitive.

VISUAL

Some people learn well by seeing or reading information.



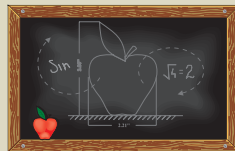
- Seek out courses in which professors use textbooks, give handouts, present information in PowerPoint presentations, show DVDs or media clips, do demonstrations, write notes on the board or on a Smartboard, and incorporate online resources such as a website that accompanies the text and other relevant websites.
- Sit near the front of the class so that you can see well and take advantage of any visual aids used in class. This will also enable you to see the professor's face and body language. It will cut down on other visual distractions and help you stay focused.
- Create concept maps, diagrams, and sketches to capture important information. It may be helpful to include color.
- Create review cards and summary sheets. Make flash cards for important terms, concepts, names, formulas, and so forth.
- Consider taking online courses.
- Before you read an assignment, preview it. Turn through it and look at any visual aids, such as illustrations, graphs, and diagrams. Look for any features designed to show the organization of the material, such as the sizes of headings and subheadings, or the numbering. Look for terms in special print, such as bold, color, or italics. Look for any special features in the margin.
- Close your eyes and visualize a difficult-to-spell word, paying special attention to the tricky part of the word. Visualize that part in color, in capital letters.
- Try writing the word with different spellings in order to see which spelling *looks* right. Look for familiar affixes and roots. On the Internet you can access countless dictionaries. When

creating a document on the computer, use the spell-check feature in the word-processing program.

- Study in a study carrel or in a place where there are few visual distractions. Don't study facing a window or doorway, for example. You may also find that you study better alone since listening is not a way you prefer to learn.
- Find a place where the light is right. Some learners like bright light; others prefer less brightness. Full-spectrum light bulbs simulate natural daylight. They can help prevent eyestrain and fatigue.
- If you anticipate being asked essay questions on tests, write out practice answers ahead of time. Making an outline may also help you prepare for the test.
- Before you begin writing a long answer on an essay test, jot down a few key words or a simple outline you can refer to as you write your answer. Jot it on the edge or back of the test paper.
- In math classes, when appropriate, draw a "picture" of the problem before you start.
- List the information that is given in the math problem (what is known) and what is not given (what is still unknown). Write down the steps to follow in solving the problem.

VISUAL-SPATIAL

**Some people think in pictures;
they are good at seeing in their mind how things fit together
and imagining how things look from another perspective.**



In addition to the suggestions for visual learners, consider these strategies:

- Make a schedule: time management may not be a strength of yours.
- Keep an assignment notebook; update it daily. Write down each assignment and its due date. Then set deadlines for yourself for completing each assignment. This is especially important if it is a long-term project that is not due immediately.
- If handwriting is problem for you, learn to type. Typing may be easier for you than writing in longhand. If handwriting and typing are both difficult for you, consider using voice-activated (speech recognition) software that types what you say aloud. (*Dragon Naturally Speaking*® software appears to be a good one. See www.nuance.com or google "speech-recognition software.")

- If you must hand-write something, try writing on graph paper rather than regular notebook paper. It can help you make your writing more uniform and therefore easier to read. Choose graph paper that has big enough squares and pale lines.
- If you have trouble lining up numbers when you do basic math operations (add, subtract, multiply, divide), try using graph paper. You can also turn notebook paper sideways and use the lines to help you line up the numbers.
- Once you have finished writing a document on the computer, use the spell-checker and grammar checker features of your word-processing program. If seeing wavy red or green error lines beneath words interferes with your concentration, simply cover or turn off the monitor while you are typing the first draft. Then uncover it or turn it on to check your work.
- Look for relationships among concepts and in the material you are learning.
- Pay attention to details; you may tend to focus on the big picture and miss the fine points.
- Picture important terms and difficult-to-spell word in your mind. Visualize the difficult part of the word in color or in huge letters. Look at the picture of the word in your mind, and then *spell the word from back to front* by visualizing your mental image of the word. When you can do that, you have a clear image of the word in mind. You *know* how to spell it. You can also create a picture to go with the word or the letters of spelling demon words.
- Use colored pens or highlighters to color code ideas or information of various types in your textbooks. You might use purple for information related to one topic and green for another, or you might use one color for major concepts and another to number the details that go with it. You might use color to show where one section of material ends and another starts. You can also record information on different color index cards.
- Use your imagination: create a story, make a mental video you can watch in your head, or draw a picture. Make a three-dimensional model or object to represent a concept. Create a game to help you learn and remember the material.
- If you usually need more time on tests, ask if you can take the test in your college's test center or if you can sit outside the professor's office to take it (or finish it).
- If you have difficulty creating outlines, create concept maps instead. You can also organize ideas visually using software such as *Inspiration*® (www.inspiration.com). It allows you to put related information inside shapes and move the pieces around as you organize the material in a way that is meaningful to you. You can also add arrows and images.
- It may help you to make enlarged copies of textbook pages or to use a larger point size when you print out pages from your computer. You may also find it helpful to print on colored paper, such as light yellow or green. Experiment to see which fonts and font sizes are easiest for you to read and whether colored paper helps.
- If reading is difficult for you, find a simpler book on a subject, preferably one with lots of pictures and illustrations, and read it first. Then go back to your textbook.
- If you type your notes or papers, leave the right margin unjustified. In other words, do not set the right margin so that all the lines end at the same place. It makes paragraphs into hard-to-read blocks of print. To make documents you type easier to read, you can also turn off the automatic hyphenation.

- When you encounter a difficult or confusing sentence, stop as you come to each punctuation mark. Try to visualize what the sentence has told you up to that point, and then continue reading until you come to next punctuation mark. Repeat the process.
- If it helps you, use your finger to guide you when you are reading. You can also place an index card beneath the line you are reading, or even cut out a frame that allows you to see only one line of print as a time.
- Try using a picture dictionary, such as *The Macmillan Visual Desk Reference*, or a simpler dictionary that includes lots of pictures.

AUDITORY

Some people learn well by hearing information.



- Sit near the front of the class so that you can hear well.
- Whenever possible, write out information in your own words. Then read it aloud.
- Repeat important information and definitions out loud.
- Read your textbook assignments, or even just especially difficult passages, aloud.
- Set information to a familiar tune. Create a rap or rhyme you can say aloud.
- Find or form a study group so you can hear material being discussed. Be sure you are prepared ahead of time so you can contribute to the group.
- Record class lectures on a small digital recorder. Remember that to benefit from it, you must listen to it and use it once you've recorded it!
- When reviewing for a test, record information in your own voice. Listen to it in your car or on your iPod when you are walking, jogging, commuting, or doing household activities that do not require full concentration (such as washing the dishes).
- When you look up a word in the dictionary, pay attention to its pronunciation; say it out loud. Most online dictionaries have pronunciations you can listen to. Franklin handheld dictionary devices (www.franklin.com) also give the pronunciation of words aloud. To find a word on a Franklin, simply start to say or spell the word phonetically.

- Pronounce a word aloud or try to hear it in your mind before you try to spell it. Sound out the parts of the word or recite the letters aloud when you are learning to spell a difficult word.
- If sound or noise bothers you when you study, find a quiet place to study. Turn off the iPod, CD player, TV, and cell phone. Use earplugs if you cannot find in a quiet place.
- Have someone call out key terms or questions to you when you review for a test.
- Look for professors who emphasize lecture, discussion, collaborative (small group) learning, and question-and-answer review sessions.
- Work with a tutor in your college's tutoring center. You will benefit from discussing material with a knowledgeable person and from hearing your questions answered aloud. Tutor someone else: you will learn by explaining the material to him or her.
- Create questions and answer them aloud as a way to review for tests.

TACTILE/KINESTHETIC

Some people are hands-on learners who learn by doing, through touching or manipulating objects, and through movement.



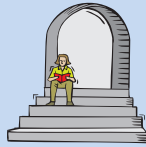
- Write down important information. The physical involvement of writing may be useful. Keyboarding (typing) may also work for you.
- Mark your textbooks: underlining and annotating are also forms of physical involvement.
- Consider taking courses that have a hands-on component, such as technical courses, science courses that have a lab component, drama classes, applied music and art classes, and courses that feature field trips or other experience-based learning.
- Create three-dimensional models.
- Use your index finger to write difficult-to-spell words and important terms in the air or on a tabletop. You can also trace the letters with your finger.
- When you study, take a short break every half hour or so. Stand up, stretch, or walk in place for a few minutes.
- Gesture as you are rereading or saying material you are trying to learn.
- Walk back and forth while you are trying to learn information. Review information by repeating it aloud as you jog, walk to class, clean house, or work out.
- Chew sugar-free gum if it helps you deal with nervous energy.

- Review material using a question-and-answer format; change your body position as you switch from question to answer and back again.
- When you study, change subjects rather than trying to study the same subject for a long period of time. For example, read only part of a long psychology assignment, shift to some math homework, and then return to the psychology assignment.
- Create a game or act out concepts you need to remember.
- Relate material to a football game or some other activity. For example, you can think of a paragraph's main idea as being like a football quarterback who calls the play, the supporting details as the rest of the team that carries out the play, and the organizational pattern as the play the coach (author) has chosen.
- Sit in the front of the room to help you stay focused and involved.

ANALYTICAL/SEQUENTIAL

Some people like to know the basic parts or principles and how they are related.

***Sequential* refers to information being organized in steps or logical order.**



- Seek out instructors who are organized and present material in a clear, organized, step-by-step fashion and who give out assignment calendars or post them online. Seek out instructors who give step-by-step directions and instructions. (Ask other students about how their instructors teach.)
- Create outlines of material you need to learn.
- Ask for clear written or verbal directions, whichever works better for you.
- Write down or repeat aloud the steps in any important procedure or process.
- Break a process down into separate steps. Break information down into smaller pieces and put them in an order that makes sense to you.
- Trial-and-error learning may work well for you.
- You are probably well organized and aware of time. If you have not already done so, create a study routine or make a schedule. Use an electronic organizer or calendar. Make a daily To Do List, and prioritize the items on it.
- Repetition is usually an effective way to reinforce your learning.

- You may find it more productive to study in the morning or early evening; staying up late probably does not work well for you.
- Eating a good breakfast and having regular meals are likely to work better for you than skipping breakfast or snacking while you study.
- You may be able to concentrate better in a quiet environment.

GLOBAL/INTUITIVE

**Global: Most people like to get the “big picture” first.
Intuitive: Some are often spontaneous in their decision-making,
and they often go with what feels right.**



- Before you read an assignment, preview it to see what it will be about. If there is an introduction or a summary, read it first. Turn through the chapter to see what it contains and how the topics are organized.
- Ask for or find several examples so that you can see what they have in common.
- Find out what the goal or end product is before you begin an assignment or project.
- Start with the end product and work backwards to see how the parts fit together.
- Read your course syllabus (description) to see what the overall goals of the course are.
- Read the introduction in your textbooks to get an overview of them at the beginning of the semester.
- Experiment to see if background sound is helpful to you when you study. If you play music, play it at a low level. Use instrumental music rather than songs with lyrics.
- You may like to study on the bed or floor.
- Snacking while you study may help you. Choose high-protein snacks rather than sugary or high-fat ones.

- Similes and metaphors may help you learn since you like to see similarities and connections.
- Wear a watch since you may tend to run late.
- For school, use a planner or organizer and an assignment notebook since your tendency may be to “go with the flow” rather than to plan.
- You are likely to benefit from working with others. Find a study-buddy or study group.
- If possible, sign up for courses in which there are opportunities to discover the answers rather than being told them.
- Study a picture of the way something will look when it is complete before you begin assembling it.