



People learn differently. Some students enjoy games. Other prefer to read or watch videos. Some write notes on everything. Some need frequent breaks. Others love to talk. How do you learn?

Learn How You Learn

As teachers, we know that people learn differently. Some students love role playing. Other need explanations. Some like grammar. Some have to move often. Others can spend a whole hour reading. Some enjoy repetition. Others hate it. What is your learning style? Read on and see whether you can recognise yourself in any of the student stories below.

Watching

Laura

Laura loves the cinema. She watches a film every week with a group of friends or, if no one is available, alone. She studies English at her company with one of our teachers, who soon discovered that Laura had problems with oral communication and found conversation difficult. Laura would not remember things her teacher or classmates told her but would yes incorporate everything written on the whiteboard and could even memorise texts from her workbook. Laura was a visual

learner.

If you believe you mostly absorb **information visually**, follow your teachers as they speak, get them to write on the board and associate new words with images. Read books and watch videos with subtitles in English. Write notes in different colours, draw as much as possible and use diagrams to link concepts. Use flashcards to learn new words and sit in front of the class where you can see the whiteboard easily.

Listening

Tom

Tom listens to music all day. He plays the guitar and sings at his church's choir. He was in a class with three other students where the teacher based most of her lectures on using the board; she gave students many written exercises and explanations. Tom followed the lessons but was always behind. One day, however, the teacher played a song for a listening exercise and Tom was the first to finish. He made spelling mistakes but knew how to pronounce every word so the teacher decided to include more listening and oral activities instead of written exercises. She also read her explanations aloud and asked all students to repeat them several times. Tom improved and though he still committed spelling mistakes he remembered most of what he had heard. Tom chiefly learned by listening.

People who predominantly **absorb data aurally** should listen attentively in class and ask for repetitions. At home, play music, the radio, audio books or computer games with the sound on. They should try to add rhythm to things they learn and, if possible, turn them into songs; record and listen to themselves; watch videos with or without subtitles; read vocabulary, explanations, rules and instructions aloud. Sit where they can hear clearly.

Whether: if.

Whiteboard: board where the teacher writes.

Link: connect.

Flashcard: card.

Aloud: in high voice.

Chiefly: mainly.

Aural: connected to listening.

Turn into: transform.

Note down: write.

Jot down: write.

Rather: instead of.

Split: divide.

Search: look for.

Mate: friend.

Boring: not interesting.

Commit: make.

Writing

Carol

Carol always carried a notebook to class where she wrote everything the teacher said. However, sometimes the lesson moved towards areas that could not be registered on paper, such as conversation activities. Carol felt she did not learn then. It turned out that Carol absorbed things while she noted them down rather than when she read or listened. Therefore, oral exercises that were not accompanied by writing would not work for her. What did the teacher do? She asked Carol to prepare a summary of every activity she did in class. Carol now felt she was really learning and had a written record to prove that.

Take notes whenever you can, jot down examples, request dictations and get the teacher to set compositions for homework if you **learn by writing**. Copy everything from the whiteboard and ask for explanations you can note down. Log onto the internet for crosswords and other puzzles. Jot things down on the margins of your book. Transcribe your notes after every lesson. Prepare cards. Write dialogues, descriptions and summaries.

Repeating

Andrew

We'll talk about me now. When I was seven years old I could not understand multiplication. Most of my friends found them hard too. However, soon afterwards we started every class by repeating the multiplication tables from 1 to 9. When the year finished we could make most mathematical operations and somehow understood the logic behind them. Even today, more than fifty years later, I can recite them nonstop.

If it's easy for you to **learn through repetition** try written exercises on

People who **memorise through writing or repetition** are not included in most learning style definitions. However, I have made separate chapters for them because writing is an integral part of language and repetition plays an essential role in memorising vocabulary.

language websites and do them several times. Ask the teacher to repeat important information and request a revision at the end of every lesson. Repeat what your instructor says to yourself. Ask for homework on the subject of the day. Play and sing songs until you've learnt all the words. Watch videos and listen to podcasts more than once. Read sentences several times. Record yourself and repeat. Write vocabulary at least twice. Copy sentences from your book. Make a study plan where you review things periodically.

Analysing

Laura

We had a group of four students who loved games so the teacher played one every other class. However, she noticed one of the students, Laura, could not apply what she learnt in those games to other situations. After a while she realised Laura did not have the ability to draw rules from disorganised information so changed her plans and now introduced explanations on the object of every single activity in class. The teacher started setting rules that students could apply on everyday cases. Laura suddenly changed because she saw there were reasons behind what the teacher did and could now profit from every activity.

If you are a **logical learner** always request explanations and rules; at home revise grammar, surf the Internet for sites that speak about the language or work out the etymology of words. Ask many questions in class. Classify new vocabulary into groups and match grammar explanations to every sentence you write. Ask for reasons when you feel lost and insist until you understand new concepts.

Socialising

Tina

We will not start talking about Tina but about her friends Albert and Joan. They work at the imports department of a cereal distributor. They all had lessons together in one class and worked perfectly well until the company changed their times so we had to split the group and place Tina with students from marketing. They had the same teacher and the same level but as time went by Tina stayed behind and couldn't follow the pace of the class. Neither the teacher nor Tina—who realised she

was learning less—could find an explanation for her weak performance.

The teacher decided to ask her friends, Albert and Joan. She discovered the truth. When they were together they used to talk in English over their lunch break and review lessons. They would ask each other questions and search for answers in the Internet. The teacher realised that Tina learnt better in an informal environment just by asking when she had doubts and getting answers from her mates rather than when receiving instructions from a tutor. The solution? We organised a study group with her new classmates who now met during the afternoon break to practise English. Tina improved immediately.

Join a conversation club or visit bars where English people go if you believe you are a **social learner**. Meet foreigners at the beach, join Facebook language groups or travel to English-speaking countries. Ask friends to explain things. Study with others as much as possible. Consider forming your own revision group. Ask your teacher to program conversation activities in every lesson.

Doing

Tim

Tim liked sports and he enjoyed doing things with his hands. However, he hated English lessons and found explanations boring. One day, his teacher suggested an activity that involved getting up from his desk and doing different tasks. Tim committed mistakes at the beginning but as the activity progressed he became better at providing answers until, at the end, he got them all right. Tim still couldn't repeat explanations but had somehow internalised rules and applied them when faced with real-life situations. Tim learnt by doing.

Those who **learn by doing** should participate actively in class and ask for games or role-plays; speak with others as much as possible and interact with native speakers; take short breaks while studying; use flashcards to help vocabulary memorisation; change position every twenty minutes or so; take part in activities that involve touching, building or moving. Trace words with fingers to help with spelling. Walk around, tap a pencil, rock a chair or hold on to something while studying.

Of course, we are all a mix so you might not recognise yourself in any of

the people above. However, do think about your school days and remember the activities you enjoyed. Did you read a lot? Did you like theatre? Did you study better in a group? This will help you recall how you learnt so you can talk to your teachers and get them to use those same methods in your language class. We acquire knowledge from varied sources that interact so time spent thinking about your learning style is a great investment. You will learn better and faster.

Andrew's advice: Learning will be easier if you learn how you learn!

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