

Why is it that all students don't learn in the same way? By doing this lesson, you will find out about different student learning styles and how to deal with them.

Task 1 – What's wrong?

Lisa is talking about her current class to a colleague, Kate.

Kate: Are you going to use this grammar game?

Lisa: I don't think so.

Kate: Why not?

Lisa: Games don't seem to work with the class I have at the moment. They usually do, but not with this class.

Kate: That's strange.

Lisa: I know. I used to love language games when I was learning Spanish. This class gets excited when we do a gap fill exercise. I don't know what's wrong with them.



Is there something wrong with Lisa's class? What should she do? Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

There is probably nothing wrong with Lisa's class. It is likely that as a group they have a learning style that prefers more serious language learning activities. Lisa and Kate are making the assumption that because *they* enjoy language learning games *all* their students will. Lisa should talk to her students directly and find out exactly what they do like. She could also do a learning styles quiz with her class to discover what kind language learning activities her students might enjoy more than games.

Key Skill

All students have different learning styles. This affects the way they behave in the classroom and their response to different materials and activities. Here are some common learning styles:

- **Fluency-focused** – *likes communicating and doing freer speaking activities*
- **Accuracy focused** – *likes to be sure that they are getting things right*
- **Visual** – *likes working with visual information when learning English*
- **Auditory** – *likes receiving information by listening and responding*
- **Kinesthetic** – *likes to include physical activities in the learning process*

It is important to realise that each learning style is a continuum and all students will have a mixture learning styles, however some may be more prevalent than others.

Task 2 – Learning styles and classroom activities



Numbers 1 to 11 describe different classroom activities. Letters a to e are the learning styles from task 1. Match each classroom activity with the correct learning style. You will need to use some of the learning styles more than once.

| Classroom activities | Learning styles |
|---|-----------------|
| 1. Mingle activities that involve walking around and talking to other students. | |
| 2. A role play done in pairs or small groups. | |
| 3. A grammar lesson taught through a context created by pictures and drawings. | |
| 4. The teacher corrects students a lot during oral pair work. | |
| 5. Listening to the teacher read stories aloud. | |
| 6. Running dictations where students have to run to a text and run back to their group to dictate what they can remember. | |
| 7. Completing a grammar gap-fill task that checks understanding. | |
| 8. Writing tasks based on graphs and tables. | |
| 9. Drilling students in a new grammar structure. | |
| 10. Listening to and responding to the teacher's oral questions. | |

Learning styles

- a. fluency-focused
- b. accuracy-focused
- c. visual
- d. auditory
- e. kinesthetic

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Task 3 – Finding out about your students’ learning styles



Match up columns A, B and C so that you create four logical sentences, then write those sentences in the empty table below.

| A | B | C |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Giving students a lecture on learning styles ... | ... is a good idea is a bad idea ... | ... because this is a quick and efficient way of having some idea of how your learners like learning. |
| 2. Doing a simple learning style quiz ... | | ... because it will give you a more in-depth idea of their learning style over a longer period of time. |
| 3. Asking students directly about their learning style ... | | ... because they probably won't understand what you are saying |
| 4. Observing how your students react to different activities ... | | ... because they probably don't know what it is. |

| Logical Sentences | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| 4. | |



Check your ideas in the answer key.

Task 4 – What can teachers do?



Once we begin to understand the different learning styles of our students, what can we do about it? Below are some descriptions of teachers' actions. Decide which actions are 'constructive' (C), and which are 'not constructive' (N). Write C or N in the right-hand column.

| Teachers' actions | C or N? |
|--|---------|
| 1. The teacher tells the learners they must change their learning style so they become better learners. | |
| 2. The teacher makes sure her/his lessons contain good variety so all learning styles are catered for. | |
| 3. The teacher makes learners aware of their learning style. | |
| 4. The teacher asks students to discuss the usefulness of different activities with their classmates. | |
| 5. The teacher monitors students carefully and tells them when they are using the wrong learning style. | |
| 6. The teacher suggests different ways of doing activities in the classroom and offers students a choice. | |
| 7. The teacher makes students aware of the fact that their classmates' learning styles are different and that sometimes they need to be flexible about their reaction to different activities. | |
| 8. The teacher always puts students with the same learning style together in pairs. | |

Check your ideas in the answer key.

Thinking about your teaching ...

It can be interesting to think about your own learning style. Do a learning style quiz to discover which kind of learner you are. Describe learning activities or ways of learning that appeal to you when learning something new. Then consider this question: “To what extent do my choices about teaching reflect my own preferred learning style?”

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Whenever you get a new group of students, spend some time trying to work out the learning style of individual members of the group as well as focusing on the group as a whole. You can do this by questionnaires and direct observation of their behaviour and response to activities. Try to strike a balance between catering for their learning style and providing them with variety.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 88 & 89 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th edition) by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is further discussion on learning styles and some alternative ways of describing students.

Learning to Learn English by Gail Ellis and Barbara Sinclair (Cambridge University Press 1989) includes many practical ideas for dealing with learning styles.

Related TaskBook lessons...

You may be interested in the following lessons in the ESOL TaskBook series, which also relate to this topic:

- Unit 1 e) **Learner autonomy:** Looks at different ways to help individual learners become more autonomous.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) a, d, e
- 2) a, d
- 3) c
- 4) b
- 5) d
- 6) b, e
- 7) b
- 8) c
- 9) b, d
- 10) d

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) Giving students a lecture on learning styles / is a bad idea / because they probably won't understand what you are saying.
- 2) Doing a simple learning style quiz / is a good idea / because this is a quick and efficient way of having some idea of how your learners like learning.
- 3) Asking students directly about their learning style / is a bad idea / because they probably don't know what it is.
- 4) Observing how your students react to different activities / is a good idea / because it will give you a more in-depth idea of their learning style over a longer period of time.

Task 4 – Feedback

- 1) **not constructive:** *While it is good to encourage students to be flexible, forcing them to change is likely to affect their motivation in a negative way.*
- 2) **constructive:** *The idea to try and please all of the students some of the time.*
- 3) **constructive:** *When students know their learning style, they are likely to be more receptive to trying alternatives.*
- 4) **constructive:** *If one student says she doesn't like listening activities, but another student explains why she likes them and finds them useful, the first student might re-evaluate her ideas.*
- 5) **not constructive:** *Adapting a learning style can only come about gradually over time. This kind of very direct feedback to a student in the middle of the activity could cause resentment.*
- 6) **constructive:** *Particularly if many learners in a group have a similar learning style. Letting students participate in the learning process in this very active way is likely to motivate them.*
- 7) **constructive:** *This means individual students are less likely to expect lessons tailored to their individual learning style all the time.*
- 8) **not constructive:** *It is good for students to experience a range of learning styles when working in groups. It can open their eyes to different ways of learning.*

