

Honey and Mumford, 1986

Learning styles—general descriptions

Activists

Activists involve themselves fully and without bias in new experiences. They enjoy the here and now and are happy to be dominated by immediate experiences. They are open-minded, not sceptical, and this tends to make them enthusiastic about anything new. Their philosophy is: 'I'll try anything once'. They tend to act first and consider the consequences afterwards. Their days are filled with activity. They tackle problems by brainstorming. As soon as the excitement from one activity has died down they are busy looking for the next. They tend to thrive on the challenge of new experiences, but are bored with implementation and longer term consolidation. They are gregarious people constantly involving themselves with others but, in doing so, they seek to centre all activities around themselves.

Reflectors

Reflectors like to stand back to ponder experiences and observe them from many different perspectives. They collect data, both first hand and from others, and prefer to think about it thoroughly before coming to any conclusion. The thorough collection and analysis of data about experiences and events is what counts, so they tend to postpone reaching definitive conclusions for as long as possible. Their philosophy is to be cautious. They are thoughtful people who like to consider all possible angles and indications before making a move. They prefer to take a back seat in meetings and discussions. They enjoy observing other people in action. They listen to others and get the drift of the discussion before making their own points. They tend to adopt a low profile and have a slightly distant, tolerant unruffled air about them. When they act it is part of a wide picture which includes the past as well as the present and others' observations as well as their own.

Theorists

Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think problems through in a vertical, step-by-step logical way. They assimilate disparate facts into coherent theories. They tend to be perfectionists who won't rest easy until things are tidy and fit into a rational scheme. They like to analyse and synthesise. They are keen on basic assumptions, principles, theories, models and systems thinking. Their philosophy prizes rationality and logic. 'If it's logical, it's good'. Questions they frequently ask are: 'Does it make sense?' 'How does this fit with that?' 'What are the basic assumptions?'. They tend to be detached, analytical and dedicated to rational objectivity rather than anything subjective or ambiguous. Their approach to problems is consistently logical. This is their 'mental set' and they rigidly reject anything that doesn't fit with it. They prefer to maximise certainty and feel uncomfortable with subjective judgements, lateral thinking and anything flippant.

Pragmatists

Pragmatists are keen on trying out ideas, theories and techniques to see if they work in practice. They positively search out new ideas and take the first opportunity to experiment with applications. They are the sort of people who return from management courses brimming with new ideas that they want to try out in practice. They like to get on with things and act quickly and confidently on ideas that attract them. They tend to be impatient with ruminating and open-ended discussions. They are essentially practical, down to earth people who like making practical decisions and solving problems. They respond to problems and opportunities 'as a challenge'. Their philosophy is: 'There is always a better way' and 'If it works, it's good'.

How those with different learning styles like to learn

As well as encouraging the development of a range of learning styles, teachers can consider how their own teaching styles affect different learners. Teachers have their own preferred learning styles and these influence the way they teach. By varying teaching methods, it is possible to both accommodate the needs of students with different learning styles and encourage the development of other learning styles. The following points indicate optimum and minimum learning opportunities for each style.

Activists learn best from:

- student-centred teaching methods such as task groups, role play, games
- unstructured activities which give them the opportunity to take a lead

Activists learn least from:

- passive learning situations such as lectures, reading alone, observing procedures
- structured teaching approaches, including coaching precision teaching structured demonstrations

Reflectors learn best from:

- any activities which enable them to observe, and think things over. They are usually happy to listen to lectures and watch demonstrations providing that they are not too directive
- individual or group tasks which involve collection and research of data
- group discussions and case studies

Reflectors learn least from:

- highly structured teaching/learning programmes
- activities which require action without planning especially if they have to take a lead role

Theorists learn best from:

- structured learning activities which follow a logical sequence
- lectures, demonstrations, well prepared coaching and precision teaching

Theorists learn least from:

- unstructured activities without an obvious purpose
- group-work, especially if it involves exploring feelings and emotions

Pragmatists learn best from:

- practical demonstrations, coaching simulations, work experience, project work
- any practical activity which provides the opportunity to try out what has been learnt
- group or individual activities which involve action planning and project work

Pragmatists learn least from:

- theoretical lectures, and discussions which explore concepts
- unstructured activities with no clear purpose

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Activist: advantages

You:

- get totally involved in something that interests you
- work well with other people, ask for help, and talk through problems with others
- enjoy writing freely - as it comes
- will try any new idea or technique
- like taking risks generally
- work quickly and get others involved and enthusiastic too
- like variety and excitement
- are not concerned about making a fool of yourself by asking questions or volunteering for something new
- learn by talking with other people
- skim-read books

Pragmatist: advantages

You:

- work well alone
- are good at setting goals and making plans of action
- know how to find information
- see the applications of a theory
- get things done on time
- don't get distracted
- have revision timetables and work plans
- organise time well and have time for other things
- read instructions carefully
- research examination papers thoroughly
- have notes classified and filed

Reflector: advantages

You:

- see new ways of doing things
- come up with creative solutions
- see long-term implications of things
- can see the total picture
- are unhurried, don't get in a flap
- listen to others and share ideas
- see connections between different subjects being studied
- present work in novel and artistically appealing ways
- are good at coming up with new alternatives
- pinpoint important new questions

Theorist: advantages

You:

- organise facts and material well
- see links between ideas
- like to understand everything you are working on
- are curious, and enjoy problems
- work things out well on paper
- work well alone with minimum help from teachers and friends
- are precise and thorough
- plan well in advance for essays and exams
- set clear goals, know why you are doing something, and which topic is of the highest priority
- rework essays and notes
- are a good critic

Activist disadvantages

You:

- don't plan work in advance
- rush into examination questions and essays without thinking them through
- tend to neglect subjects you're not interested in
- are not good at organising time
- try to do too many things at once
- are not good at working out priorities
- leave things until the last minute
- can be demanding of friends
- can't be bothered with details
- don't read through or check work
- don't rework notes or classify material

Pragmatist: disadvantages

You:

- are impatient with others' viewpoints
- think there is only one way of doing something - your way!
- fail to use friends and teachers as resources
- can't 'see the wood for the trees'
- get preoccupied with details
- lack imagination
- are poor at coming up with new questions
- often don't work well with others
- are more concerned with getting the job done than with making sure it's really a good job
- cut corners
- are not very interested in presentation of your work

Reflector: disadvantages

You:

- can't see the 'trees for the wood' - forget important details
- wait too long before getting started
- can be uncritical of ideas
- don't organise work well
- don't like work or revision timetables
- only work in bursts of energy
- forget to take key books, etc for homework
- are easily distracted from the job in hand
- don't rework notes or classify material
- are too easy-going, not assertive enough with friends or teachers

Theorist: disadvantages

You:

- need too much information before getting down to work and allowing yourself an opinion
- fail to use friends and teachers as resources
- are reluctant to try new approaches
- can get bogged down in theory
- like to do things in a set way –uncreative
- don't trust feelings - your own or others'
- don't function very well in group discussions
- keep problems to yourself
- only trust logic
- are overcautious, don't like taking risks