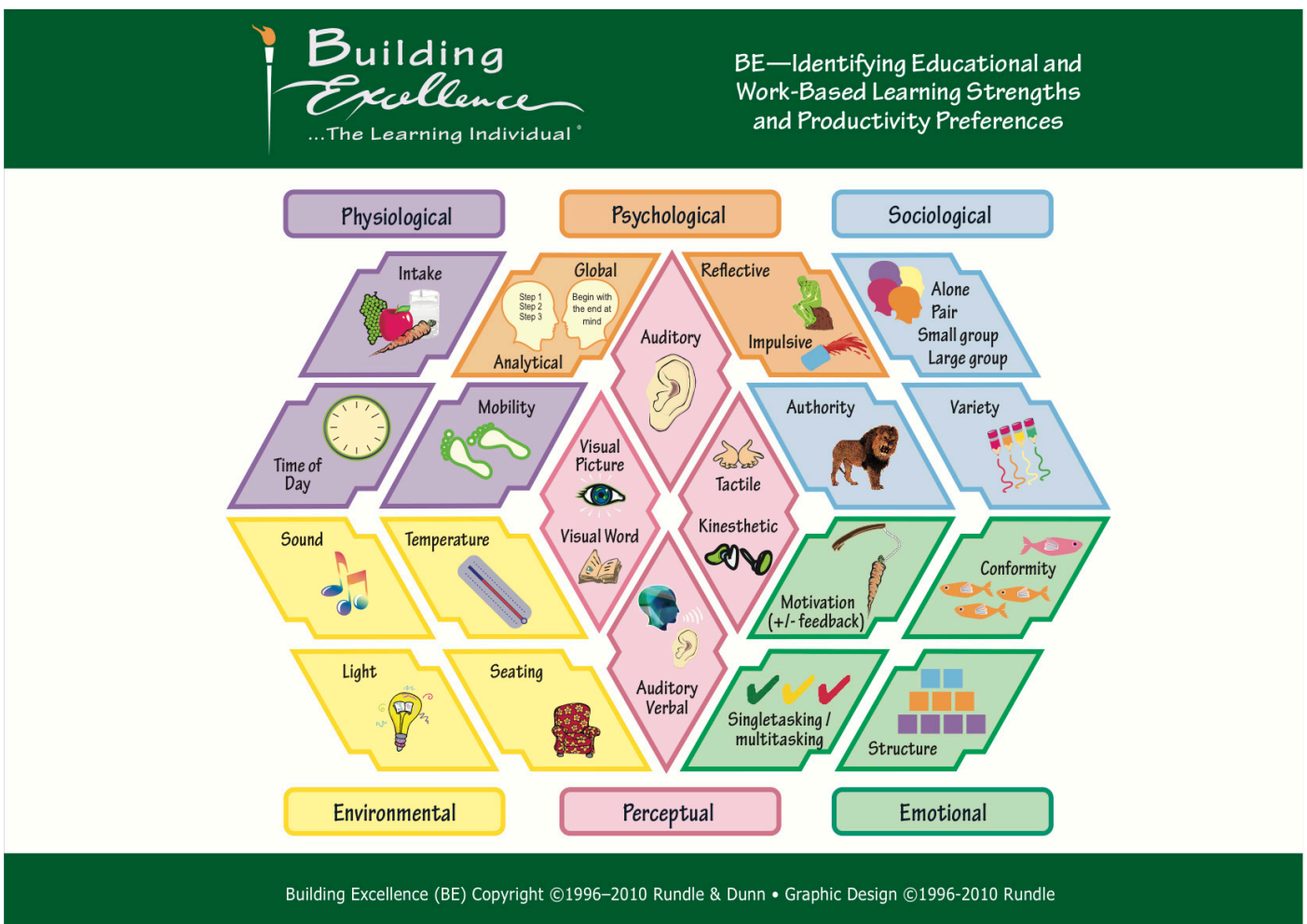




# What is Learning Styles?

A brief introduction to Learning Styles and Building Excellence





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# Constant Learning Creates a Constant Need for Learning Styles

We never stop learning in life – all the way through the education system, when we attend courses and seminars, but also at work and as we go about our everyday lives in general. We need to learn new things, and we need to learn how to learn, because modern-day life requires us to be adaptable all the time and able to start performing new tasks.

As a result, it is important to know how to learn, and learning styles become the key to such knowledge.

Learning styles may be defined as follows:

The methods we apply whenever we need to;

- concentrate on new and difficult information;
- absorb this information through our senses;
- process the information and transform it into knowledge;
- store this knowledge in our brains;
- retain the knowledge we have stored.

Certain general conditions must be fulfilled before we are ready to learn in a proper and effective way. Among other things, we should be well adjusted emotionally, be motivated, and get on with our fellow team members. We all know how difficult it can be to concentrate if we feel unhappy or come under stress. We all know that it simply does not work if we are not motivated or interested in the topics concerned, and finally we all know how hopeless it seems if we have been forced to work with people we do not really get along with.

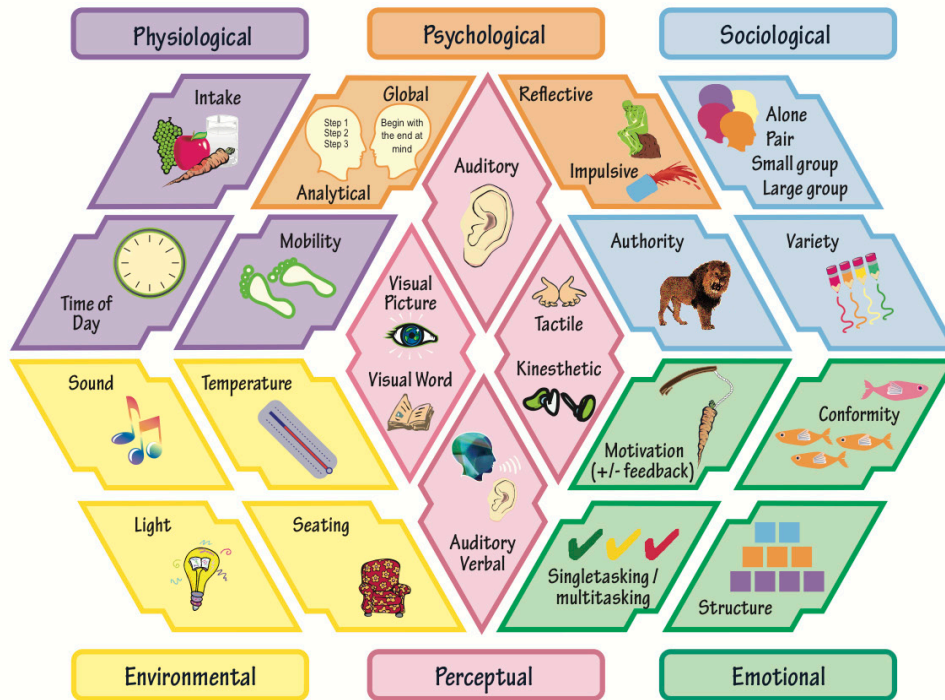
Aspects like the ones above represent the packaging of effective learning, and if the packaging is in place, we have created the ideal framework for getting started on our learning process.

Once we finally get started, several factors will enter into the process, and these factors are exactly what constitute our learning styles.

Building Excellence illustrated on the next page, comprises a total of 28 factors that may have a positive or negative influence on our learning process. The influence is positive if we are allowed to use our strengths and negative if we are forced to learn in ways that do not suit us.

The 28 factors have been divided among six main categories with individual colours:

- the senses (perceptual elements), pink;
- information processing and response modes (psychological elements), orange;
- the body (physiological elements), purple;
- the surroundings (environmental elements), light yellow;
- feelings (emotional elements), light green;
- interaction (sociological elements), light blue.



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Log on to [www.learningstyles.net](http://www.learningstyles.net) to create your own personal learning style profile, i.e. to determine how you learn most effectively. At the same time, you will get access to a series of strategies on how to use your learning style strengths the best way possible.

Everybody has between 6 and 14 strengths in his or her individual profile, and these are the strengths you should use in your learning process. No strength is better than others – they are all equally valuable and useful.

It is important to keep in mind that there is no such thing as an “approved” way of learning which works for everyone. The right way of learning is your very own way of learning.

Now let us study the different components of the learning style model in more detail.

## The Senses (Perceptual Elements)

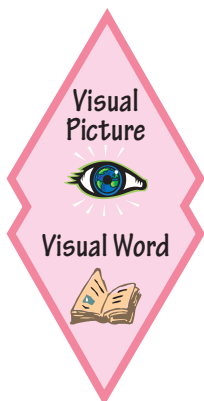
The elements below are important for our ability to absorb information and later retain the things we have learnt.



### Auditory

As an auditory learner, you prefer to learn by only listening to other people. For instance, you like lectures, presentations and recordings.

Being an auditory learner, you often find it difficult to take notes while listening: It simply makes you loose your concentration.



### Visual

A visual person learns by seeing. If you are picture-visual, you prefer to learn by looking at pictures of all kinds; photos, drawings, tables, flow charts etc. Picture-visual learners often create mental images.

If you are text-visual, you prefer to learn by looking at text, i.e. by reading. Many people are both text-visual and picture-visual learners, but you do not have to be both at the same time.



## Tactual and/or kinesthetic

As a tactual learner, you need to use your fine motor skills (i.e. your hands) when learning. You take notes, make drawings, use the computer regularly, knit, click your ballpoint pen etc.

As a kinesthetic learner, you need to use your gross motor skills, i.e. your whole body. You might walk around while reading or talking to other people, or you might take part in games where you get to activate your whole body. Many kinesthetic people, especially adults, need to be actively involved with the material while they are learning. Thus, role playing games, case work, etc. are ideal work methods for this group of learners.



## Auditory-Verbal

As an auditory-verbal learner, you need to talk while receiving information through your ears or eyes. Sense perception is taking place while you are talking: You use your body (gestures and facial expressions) and speech organs, and you hear yourself talking. Being an auditory-verbal learner, you often ask questions even though you already know the answer.

## Information Processing (Psychological Elements)

Our preferred way to process new and difficult information.



### Analytical

As an analytical learner, you prefer to take in information one piece at a time. Information must be presented step-by-step in a sequential order and finally lead to “the big picture” or overall view. The analytical approach to information processing is called inductive or bottom-up.



### Global

As a global learner, you prefer to start with “the big picture” in order to study and understand the smaller concepts afterwards. The global approach to information processing is called deductive or top-down.



### Integrated

Some people are able to use both an analytical and global approach; this group is referred to as integrated learners. When processing information, they do not follow any particular patterns but merely listen to their gut feelings.

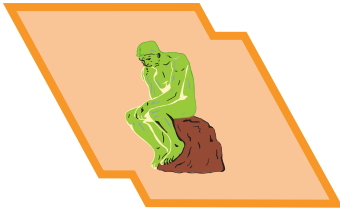
Here is an example to illustrate the difference between the analytical and global approach: If we are supposed to go from A to B, the analytical person will print out driving directions from the internet and follow them. A global person cannot cope with the many details – at least not until he has had a chance to look at a roadmap. By looking at a map, the global person gets the overall view which enables him to understand the details.

In Western culture, the analytical approach is generally considered to be the most “sophisticated”. This conception is completely wrong because the analytical and global learning styles only tell us how our brains work and do not reveal anything about our ability to work and present information to other people.



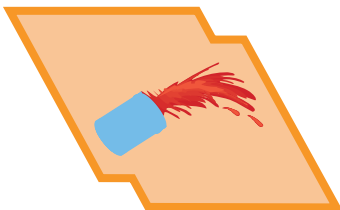
## Response Modes (Psychological Elements)

The way in which we answer questions, make decisions and solve problems.



### Reflective

Reflective people need time to review all their options before they answer questions, make decisions and solve problems. In some extreme cases, the reflective attitude can lead to analysis paralysis – and it should never become a bad excuse for not participating in class discussions or in group work. Many reflective people are accused of being too quiet and introvert, and sometimes they are even looked upon as less intelligent people. If a reflective person senses this attitude, he is very likely to come under stress and become frustrated.

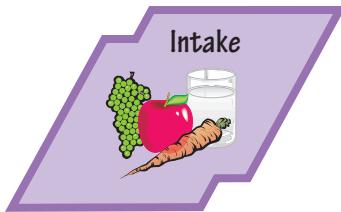


### Impulsive

An impulsive person shoots from the hip and usually reviews his answer or solution while he is talking. When taken to the extreme, the impulsive attitude means that other people hardly get a chance to speak. It is not uncommon that impulsive people come across as annoying, and they are often put in their place. This reaction could also cause feelings of stress and frustration.

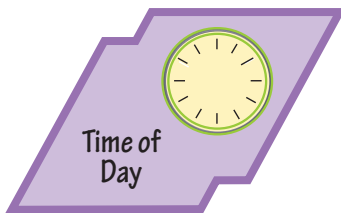
## The Body (Physiological Elements)

The elements below are important for our ability to concentrate and stay focused while we are learning.



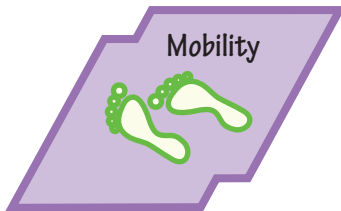
### Intake

Some people find it easier to concentrate when they nibble, eat or drink something while they are learning. Other people wait until they have finished working because eating and drinking make them lose their concentration.



### Time of Day

We all have our special peak time, whether it be early or late morning, early or late in the afternoon, or in the evening – a few people prefer to work at night.



### Mobility

Some people become restless and fidgety when they have to work in the same place for extended periods of time. They need to stand up, walk around or merely find a new place to work. It is not the same as being kinesthetic because a kinesthetic learner activates his body or involves himself actively in the learning process. People who need to move or find a new place to work have to move about every now and then.

## The Immediate Surroundings (Environmental Elements)

The elements below are important for our ability to concentrate and stay focused while we are learning.

### Sound



### Sound

Some people find it easier to concentrate with sound – usually music – in the background. Others prefer peace and quiet. Background music should not be confused with entertainment. In actual fact, the former group listens to music in order to avoid any outside disturbance – the music blocks out potential noises.

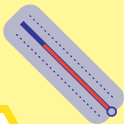
### Light



### Light

Strong and direct lighting works for some people, while others find it immensely annoying – it might even make them feel tense. These people need dim and indirect lighting.

### Temperature



### Temperature

Hot ambient temperatures can make some people feel sluggish, while others need a high room temperature in order to concentrate on their work.

### Seating



### Seating

A lot of people are only able to get some work done if they are sitting on a straight back chair at the “good old” desk. Others have to sit in a comfortable armchair, perhaps with their legs placed on the table, - or it might enhance their ability to concentrate if they are lying on a couch or on the floor.

## Feelings (Emotional Elements)

The elements below are important for our ability to approach different tasks and complete such tasks successfully. The elements do not comprise feelings of depression, joy, sullenness etc.



### Motivation

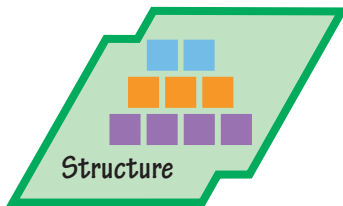
Motivation means that some people need feedback on their performance, i.e. they need to know if they are on the right track. Other people are internally motivated and do not need supervision; they follow their gut feelings and are often annoyed by having someone else, e.g. a teacher, commenting on their performance. Thus, in connection with learning styles, "motivation" does not refer to the enthusiasm or energy you show while learning.



### Conformity

Conform learners do not wish to discuss nor influence the learning situation – the class, course or academic subject. Conform learners are content to follow the ground rules already established – they go with the tide. However, this does not mean that conform learners are merely puppets on a string; they just want to get going.

Non-conform learners need to voice their opinion about the learning situation, not necessarily to make changes and not to be difficult. Non-conform learners swim against the tide but only because they need to understand their own role in the learning situation and feel they are part of it.



## Structure

Some people need someone else to organise the material or provide procedures for work tasks. Such learners might prefer set questions, specific guidelines for their work, or exercises relating to the text they have been asked to read. Other people like to create their own procedures. The latter group would find set questions, text-related exercises and guidelines stressful and restrictive.



## Tasks Persistence (Multi-Tasking vs. Single-Tasking)

Many people prefer to work on one task at a time and complete it before moving on to the next. Others like to work on several tasks simultaneously. People who are single-task persistent, the former group, and those who are multi-task persistent, the latter group, lose interest if they are forced to work in alternative ways.

In this respect, it should be noted that multi-tasking is not the same as continuous partial attention and thereby the inability to remain focused. Genuine multi-tasking skills mean that you are able to complete all your tasks without getting sidetracked. Continuous partial attention means that you move from one task to another without actually getting anywhere.

Thus, single-tasking is not the only solution, and sometimes people who are single-task persistent never move on to the next task because they get completely wrapped up in their work.

## Interaction (Sociological Elements)

Our preferred way(s) of learning and interacting effectively with others.



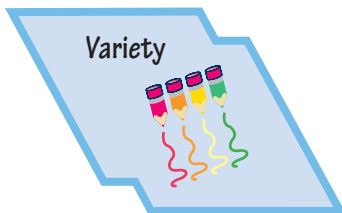
### Alone, Pair, Group/Team?

Most people dislike working in large teams, which usually consists of more than five members. Many people prefer to work alone, but you also find a lot of people who do not mind working in pairs or in groups of three members.



### Authority

Some people prefer to leave an authority figure, e.g. a teacher, in charge. It is not a matter of being motivated, receiving feedback or getting things organised - these are all stressors (emotional factors); it is solely a question of getting the academic support required in the learning process. Other people prefer to work alone without interacting with an authority figure.



### Variety

To some people, it is all-important that they get a chance to learn and work in different settings, i.e. alone, in pairs, in small groups or large teams, or perhaps under the supervision of an authority figure. Other people always need to work in the same way. Variety may also comprise non-social elements, i.e. whether people prefer to follow a certain routine at all times or like a change of scene



## Learning Styles Kept Simple

- We all learn in different ways, i.e. we all have different learning style profiles.
- No learning style is better than others.
- Learning styles are values which can lead to life and energy, creativity and development.
- You should use your learning style strengths, and it is your responsibility to do so.
- You cannot learn effectively if you force yourself to learn in ways that do not suit you, or if you are forced to do so by others.
- Make sure you do not disturb other people while you are using your learning styles.
- Having a specific learning style does not mean that you are automatically put into a specific category. You are much more than a “kinesthetic”, “tactile”, “visual” or “auditory” learner. Your learning styles may actually change over time, due to the influence of other people.



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