

## Language Learning And Your Style



It's amazing how some people can effortlessly memorise countless footy scores or recite poems and songs and yet find learning a language, at times, challenging. Why do we learn some things more easily than others? In the same way that an athlete improves performance by knowing how his or her body works, you can improve your language learning effectiveness by knowing how your brain works.

Learning in a typical classroom environment works well for some people while others thrive in learning environments with movement and change or others benefit from solely listening to the instructor. Traditionally in school classrooms we sat and took notes and listened to the instructor. A student whose natural learning style differs may have deduced that they not capable learners. In reality, the student simply has not had the chance to learn in a way that suits him or her best.

Understanding your own natural learning style is one element to improve your language learning effectiveness. Unconsciously, you probably already know how you learn and what practices work best for you. This article sheds light on three different learning styles; visual, audio and Kinesthetic and provides tips suited for each style.

### **The Visual Learner:**

Your natural learning style may be that of a Visual learner if you remember written directions well and you need to see materials to best absorb a lesson. Perhaps lessons with few visuals impede your focus. If you relate to this learning style, you prefer using images, pictures, colours, and maps to organise information. To supplement your weekly language lesson, you may need to use visual aids when studying. Picture dictionaries may be great for you as often you think in pictures. When reviewing your notes, use a colour coding method and write out key points. While learning new words visualise the spelling. You focus best in small group classes or one-to-one lessons. You need to interpret the instructor's body language and facial expressions to fully comprehend the lesson. You also crave handouts and homework.

### **Audio**

Your natural learning style may be that of an Auditory learner if you can remember accurately what you hear but may have difficulties remembering what you read or write. You find it hard to read facial and body language. You learn best in verbal lectures, discussions, listening to others and talking aloud to resolve an issue. Auditory learners intuitively interpret the underlying

meaning of speech listening to pitch, tones, speed and other voice nuances. Written information has the most meaning when read aloud or by digital recording replay.

If you relate to this learning style, to supplement your weekly language lesson, you may wish to record yourself saying vocabulary and listen to it over and over again. Repetition is key and this practise of saying and repeating will help trigger memory. Perhaps study with a partner to talk about key lesson points or use picture dictionaries and say the pictures aloud.

### **Kinesthetic or Tactile**

Your natural learning style may be that of a Kinesthetic or Tactile learner if you need hands-on activities involving touch and movement. You may have difficulty sitting for long periods and assembling furniture or toy model airplanes is a snap for you. Kinesthetic learners are constantly moving when studying by tapping their fingers or feet and playing with hair or continuously squeezing a stress ball. Tactile or Kinesthetic persons best learn through a hands-on learning approaches and actively explore the physical world around them.

As a Kinesthetic learner you may wish to take class notes using diagrams. Perhaps stand and walk around a room while reviewing weekly notes. Use flashcards and place around the room or move the cards around on a table. Re-write your notes when studying and use colour coding. Record your voice saying new vocabulary or read your notes and play back while exercising or doing chores. Take frequent breaks when studying and stretch. Try studying in a position other than a chair and desk set-up and use your fidgeting to its best help to focus on learning.

### **The following tips can be applied across learning styles.**

Word Association. The brain learns by associating something new with something old. When introduced to a new vocabulary visualise the word and try and connect this word with one you may already know.

Learn by Chunking. Chunking means learning by organising into familiar manageable units. For example learning short three word expressions provides an excellent learning base and obviously is easier than trying to learn longer word sentences.

Categorise: In our language lessons, we often categorise vocabulary into weekly themes. For example in our children's classes, one week we teach body parts in the *My Body Makes Music* theme and a different week we teach house vocabulary in the *Whose House Is This* theme. For adult learners you may wish to make lists and categorise food words, house words, clothing words etc. Display these lists around the house and refer to them often.

Read stories. Brain research has shown that when vocabulary is presented in a meaningful manner retention is greatest. Read newspaper articles or stories such as children's books in the target language. Language Champs

children's classes often finish with a theme-related story. As an adult you may benefit enormously from reading children's books as you may already be familiar with the story and translation is easy.

Understand Language Structure. Languages have similarities in their structure. All languages have present and past tenses and sight words; high frequency words, such as the, and, I, was etc. European languages have common origin words such as *Mother* and in German *Mutter* or *night* in French is *nuit* in German *Nacht*, in Polish *noc* in Greek *nyx*. Knowing certain language structure nuances will dramatically increase your ability to learn the language.

Learn Sight Words. Most languages have sight words, words such as I, he, and, the etc... that are used in the language up to 30 percent of the time. Obtain a list of the top 200 most used words used in the particular language know them and this will provide a solid basis of knowing the language.

Understanding Cognates – Many English words are very similar in other languages with just differ in the word ending. For example in Spanish the word *necessary* is *necesario* or *map* is *mapa*. Another example in Italian knowing that “tion” becomes “ione” then one can easily know words such as *action* that become *accione* and *station* become *stazione*. Combining the two elements of knowing the site words along with understanding word endings a language learner can know perhaps 50% of the language. Learning the language becomes easier.

Understanding False Cognates – There are also false cognates or what linguist refer to as “false friends”. Words that sound and look the same but do not share similar meaning. In Spanish for example *once* means eleven not *one time* or *carpeta* means *folder* not *carpet*. Both German and English use the word *fast* but in German it means *almost*. Memorising a list of false friends can help you avoid much embarrassment when using the language.

Listen to Music. Music speaks to a certain part of our brain that makes remembering so much easier. Find foreign language music and appreciate the musical talents of the culture.

Learn By Speaking And Doing. Whole brain learning has shown that learning is associated with movement. Children learn a language in the first two years by listening to commands that require them to do something. This type of learning is called Total Physical Response. We utilise this technique frequently often in our children's classes. As an adult learner, you may try to do the same. If you learning verb or emotion vocabulary, as an example, do the actions while saying the vocabulary aloud. Hence, stand, sit, make the facial expressions as happy, sad or frightened. It is fun and this practise of verbalising and movement will help solidify the vocabulary in your brain.

Think in the language. This is a crucial step that will improve your language fluency ten-fold. Frequently we see this event at our school with our newly arrived language teachers. Their English improves dramatically when they tell

me they begin to start thinking in English versus their native language. As a language learner you may wish to try an exercise for example, at a restaurant. Think about the food related lesson you may have learned in a recent language class and review the menu in the target language. This will reinforce what you have learned and the words will start flowing automatically.

Translate. Once you have established some knowledge in the language, attempt to translate the language. One of our English students used this technique and had enormous success. She was from Japan and her English improved dramatically when she started translating her young child's school beginning-to-read books. She photocopied her daughter's readers and translated the words to Japanese. Gradually she was able to translate newspaper and magazine articles and more complex writing styles. In the beginning it took her hours to look up words. However this process became so much quicker and easier even though the complexity of the writing increased greatly. Translating written words is highly beneficial because it targets language as a whole not just as parts such as learning phrases or vocabulary in isolation. Translate something that you are expert in or a children's book. You will be amazed at how many cognates you may know.

Reflect. Periodically stop and reflect on how much language you have already learned and what strategies are working best for you. Adjust your learning habits where appropriate and to take language acquisition it to a higher level. Congratulate yourself, give yourself a high five and continue to enjoy your learning process!

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