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Learning Styles and Their Related Strategies

Learning styles are the general approaches students use to learn a new language or to do any complex task. The following is a list of key learning styles related to L2 development, along with the learning strategies (specific learner behaviors) that relate to those styles (Galbraith and Gardner 1988; Oxford 1990, in press a, in press b; Skehan 1989).

Analytic students highlight grammatical details dissect words and sentences and seek precision, avoiding guessing and approximation.

Global learners prefer socially interactive, communicative events that emphasize the main idea, and eschew the details and grammatical minutiae as much as possible. They like to guess and predict and are not worried if they don't know every item.

Visual students love to read and obtain visual stimulation from pictures, bulletin boards, and blackboards and do not enjoy constant auditory stimulation without visual aids. These students take copious notes and often review them.

Auditory students, on the other hand, can work with exceptionally large amounts of auditory stimulation and prefer not to be bombarded with visual input. They seek out conversation partners and opportunities for interaction.

Hands-on (tactile and kinesthetic) students like movement, need frequent breaks, and enjoy working with tangible objects, collages, and flash cards. They often like total physical response.

Intuitive learners typically think in abstract, large-scale, non sequential ways and are often bored by the concrete, step-by-step learning or highly programmed instruction. These students seek the "underlying system" of the L2 and constantly revise their understandings based on newly gained data.

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Sequential students prefer to have materials presented in very concrete, sequential ways without much abstraction into general principles; they dislike randomness and inconsistency in lesson plans. These students frequently like memory strategies and methodical planning techniques.

Open students treat L2 learning as a game rather than a set of serious tasks; they are flexible, spontaneous, fun-loving learners who do not like deadlines or a great deal of preparation. These students avoid planning strategies but prefer social, lighthearted strategies for L2 learning.

Closure-oriented students are hardworking, organized, and serious, and have a strong need for clarity in deadlines and assignments. They use extensive planning and evaluation strategies.

Note that in any learner, an overlapping of styles is natural; learners approach tasks from combinations of styles that can vary according to the time of day or the subject matter, for example.

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