

## Index of Learning Styles (ILS) Learning Style Questionnaire

*This questionnaire is designed to find out what your learning preferences are. It was originally designed by Felder and Silverman at North Carolina State University, USA.*

### Directions

To complete the questionnaire please circle "a" or "b" to indicate your answer to every question. You may only choose one answer for each question and you must answer every question. If both "a" and "b" seem to apply to you, please choose the one that applies more frequently.

1. I understand something better after I
  - (a) try it out.
  - (b) think it through.
2. I would rather be considered
  - (a) realistic.
  - (b) innovative.
3. When I think about what I did yesterday, I am most likely to get
  - (a) a picture.
  - (b) words.
4. I tend to
  - (a) understand details of a subject but may be fuzzy about its overall structure.
  - (b) understand the overall structure but may be fuzzy about details.
5. When I am learning something new, it helps me to
  - (a) talk about it.
  - (b) think about it.
6. If I were a teacher, I would rather teach a course
  - (a) that deals with facts and real life situations.
  - (b) that deals with ideas and theories.
7. I prefer to get new information in
  - (a) pictures, diagrams, graphs, or maps.
  - (b) written directions or verbal information.

8. Once I understand
  - (a) all the parts, I understand the whole thing.
  - (b) the whole thing, I see how the parts fit.
9. In a study group working on difficult material, I am more likely to
  - (a) jump in and contribute ideas.
  - (b) sit back and listen.
10. I find it easier
  - (a) to learn facts.
  - (b) to learn concepts.
11. In a book with lots of pictures and charts, I am likely to
  - (a) look over the pictures and charts carefully.
  - (b) focus on the written text.
12. When I solve maths problems
  - (a) I usually work my way to the solutions one step at a time.
  - (b) I often just see the solutions but then have to struggle to figure out the steps to get to them.
13. In classes I have taken
  - (a) I have usually got to know many of the students.
  - (b) I have rarely got to know many of the students.
14. In reading non-fiction, I prefer
  - (a) something that teaches me new facts or tells me how to do something.
  - (b) something that gives me new ideas to think about.
15. I like teachers
  - (a) who put a lot of diagrams on the board.
  - (b) who spend a lot of time explaining.
16. When I'm analysing a story or a novel
  - (a) I think of the incidents and try to put them together to figure out the themes.
  - (b) I just know what the themes are when I finish reading and then I have to go back and find the incidents that demonstrate them.
17. When I start a homework problem, I am more likely to
  - (a) start working on the solution immediately.
  - (b) try to fully understand the problem first.

18. I prefer the idea of  
(a) certainty.  
(b) theory.
19. I remember best  
(a) what I see.  
(b) what I hear.
20. It is more important to me that an instructor  
(a) lay out the material in clear sequential steps.  
(b) give me an overall picture and relate the material to other subjects.
21. I prefer to study  
(a) in a group.  
(b) alone.
22. I am more likely to be considered  
(a) careful about the details of my work.  
(b) creative about how to do my work.
23. When I get directions to a new place, I prefer  
(a) a map.  
(b) written instructions.
24. I learn  
(a) at a fairly regular pace. If I study hard, I'll "get it."  
(b) in fits and starts. I'll be totally confused and then suddenly it all "clicks."
25. I would rather first  
(a) try things out.  
(b) think about how I'm going to do it.
26. When I am reading for enjoyment, I like writers to  
(a) clearly say what they mean.  
(b) say things in creative, interesting ways.
27. When I see a diagram or sketch in class, I am most likely to remember  
(a) the picture.  
(b) what the instructor said about it.

28. When considering a body of information, I am more likely to
- (a) focus on details and miss the big picture.
  - (b) try to understand the big picture before getting into the details.
29. I more easily remember
- (a) something I have done.
  - (b) something I have thought a lot about.
30. When I have to perform a task, I prefer to
- (a) master one way of doing it.
  - (b) come up with new ways of doing it.
31. When someone is showing me data, I prefer
- (a) charts or graphs.
  - (b) text summarizing the results.
32. When writing a paper, I am more likely to
- (a) work on (think about or write) the beginning of the paper and progress forward.
  - (b) work on (think about or write) different parts of the paper and then order them.
33. When I have to work on a group project, I first want to
- (a) have a "group brainstorming" where everyone contributes ideas.
  - (b) brainstorm individually and then come together as a group to compare ideas.
34. I consider it higher praise to call someone
- (a) sensible.
  - (b) imaginative.
35. When I meet people at a party, I am more likely to remember
- (a) what they looked like.
  - (b) what they said about themselves.
36. When I am learning a new subject, I prefer to
- (a) stay focused on that subject, learning as much about it as I can.
  - (b) try to make connections between that subject and related subjects.
37. I am more likely to be considered
- (a) outgoing.
  - (b) reserved.

38. I prefer courses that emphasise
- (a) concrete material (facts, data).
  - (b) abstract material (concepts, theories).
39. For entertainment, I would rather
- (a) watch television.
  - (b) read a book.
40. Some teachers start their lectures with an outline of what they will cover. Such outlines are
- (a) somewhat helpful to me.
  - (b) very helpful to me.
41. The idea of doing homework in groups, with one grade for the entire group,
- (a) appeals to me.
  - (b) does not appeal to me.
42. When I am doing long calculations,
- (a) I tend to repeat all my steps and check my work carefully.
  - (b) I find checking my work tiresome and have to force myself to do it.
43. I tend to picture places I have been
- (a) easily and fairly accurately.
  - (b) with difficulty and without much detail.
44. When solving problems in a group, I would be more likely to
- (a) think of the steps in the solution process.
  - (b) think of possible consequences or applications of the solution in a wide range of areas.

Now turn to the scoring sheet so you can see where your preferences are.

## Learning Styles Questionnaire Scoring Sheet

1. Place a "1" in the appropriate spaces in the table below (e.g. if you answered "a" to Question 3, put a "1" in Column "a" by Question 3).
2. Add up the columns and write the totals in the indicated spaces.
3. For each of the four scales, subtract the smaller total from the larger one. Write the difference (1 to 11) and the letter (a or b) with the larger total.

Activist/Reflector			Sensing/Intuitive			Visual/Verbal			Sequential/Global		
Q	a	b	Q	a	b	Q	a	b	Q	a	b
1			2			3			4		
5			6			7			8		
9			10			11			12		
13			14			15			16		
17			18			19			20		
21			22			23			24		
25			26			27			28		
29			30			31			32		
33			34			35			36		
37			38			39			40		
41			42			43			44		
<i>Total (add up each column)</i>											
Activist/Reflector			Sensing/Intuitive			Visual/Verbal			Sequential/Global		
Q	a	b	Q	a	b	Q	a	b	Q	a	b
<i>Larger – Smaller + Letter of Larger (see below*)</i>											

*\*Example: If your total was 3 for a and 8 for b:  $8 - 3 = 5$ , b is letter of larger so you would enter 5b.*

**Explanation of scores**

- If your score on a scale is 1-3, you have a mild preference for one or the other dimension but you are essentially well balanced.
- If your score on a scale is 5-7, you have a moderate preference for one dimension of the scale and will learn more easily in a teaching environment which favours that dimension.
- If your score on a scale is 9-11, you have a strong preference for one dimension of the scale. You may have real difficulty learning in an environment which does not support that preference.

## Learning Styles and Strategies

### 1. Learning Styles

Everybody takes in information and processes this in different ways. You could do this by seeing and hearing, reflecting and acting, reasoning logically and intuitively, analysing and visualising, steadily and in fits and starts and so on. Teaching methods also vary with some tutors lecturing, others demonstrating or leading students to self-discovery; some focus on principles and others on applications; some emphasise memory and others understanding.

When mismatches exist between the learning styles of a student and the teaching style of the tutor, you may become bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, and get discouraged about the courses, the curriculum, and yourself.

The questionnaire you have just completed will give you an idea of your learning preferences. Below you will find more information on what these mean, and how you can learn most effectively.

### 2. Active and Reflective Learners

Active learners tend to retain and understand information best by doing something active with it e.g. discussing or applying it or explaining it to others. Reflective learners prefer to think about things quietly first.

"Let's try it out and see how it works" is an active learner's phrase; "Let's think it through first" is the reflective learner's response.

Active learners tend to like group work more than reflective learners, who prefer working alone.

Sitting through lectures without getting to do anything physical but take notes is hard for both learning types, but particularly hard for active learners.

*Everybody is active sometimes and reflective sometimes.* Your preference for one category or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. A balance of the two is desirable. If you always act before reflecting you can jump into things prematurely and get into trouble, while if you spend too much time reflecting you may never get anything done.



***How can active learners help themselves?***

If you are an active learner in a class that allows little or no class time for discussion or problem-solving activities, you should try to compensate for these when you study. Study in a group in which the members take turns explaining different topics to each other. Work with others to guess what you will be asked on the next test and figure out how you will answer. You will always retain information better if you find ways to do something with it.

***How can reflective learners help themselves?***

If you are a reflective learner in a class that allows little or not class time for thinking about new information, you should try to compensate for this lack when you study. Don't simply read or memorize the material; stop periodically to review what you have read and to think of possible questions or applications. You might find it helpful to write short summaries of readings or class notes in your own words. Doing so may take extra time but will enable you to retain the material more effectively.

**3. Sensing and Intuitive Learners**

Sensing learners tend to like learning facts; intuitive learners often prefer discovering possibilities and relationships.

Sensors often like solving problems by well-established methods and dislike complications and surprises; intuitors like innovation and dislike repetition. Sensors are more likely than intuitors to resent being tested on material that has not been explicitly covered in class.

Sensors tend to be patient with details and good at memorizing facts and doing hands-on (laboratory) work; intuitors may be better at grasping new concepts and are often more comfortable than sensors with abstractions and mathematical formulations.

Sensors tend to be more practical and careful than intuitors; intuitors tend to work faster and to be more innovative than sensors.

Sensors don't like courses that have no apparent connection to the real world; intuitors don't like "plug-and-chug" courses that involve a lot of memorization and routine calculations.

*Everybody is sensing sometimes and intuitive sometimes.* To be effective as a learner and problem solver, you need to be able to function both ways. If you overemphasize intuition, you may miss important details or make careless mistakes in calculations or

hands-on work; if you overemphasize sensing, you may rely too much on memorization and familiar methods and not concentrate enough on understanding and innovative thinking.

### ***How can sensing learners help themselves?***

Sensors remember and understand information best if they can see how it connects to the real world. If you are in a class where most of the material is abstract and theoretical, you may have difficulty. Ask your tutor for specific examples of concepts and procedures, and find out how the concepts apply in practice. If the teacher does not provide enough specifics, try to find some in your course text or other references or by brainstorming with friends or classmates.

### ***How can intuitive learners help themselves?***

Many classes are aimed at intuitors. However, if you are an intuitor and you happen to be in a class that deals primarily with memorization and rote substitution in formulas, you may have trouble with boredom. Ask your tutor for interpretations or theories that link the facts, or try to find the connections yourself. You may also be prone to careless mistakes on tests because you are impatient with details and don't like repetition (as in checking your completed solutions). Take time to read the entire question before you start answering and be sure to check your results.

## **4. Visual and Verbal Learners**

Visual learners remember best what they see e.g. pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films, demonstrations etc. Verbal learners get more out of words such as written and spoken explanations. Everyone learns more when information is presented both visually and verbally.

In some classes, very little visual information is presented: students mainly listen to lectures and read material written on chalkboards and in textbooks and handouts. Unfortunately, most people are visual learners, which means that most students do not get nearly as much as they would if more visual presentation were used in class. Good learners are capable of processing information presented either visually or verbally.

### ***How can visual learners help themselves?***

If you are a visual learner, try to find diagrams, sketches, schematics, photographs, flow charts, or any other visual representation of course material that is predominantly verbal. Ask your tutor, consult reference books, and see if any videotapes or CD-ROM displays of

the course material are available. Prepare a concept map by listing key points, enclosing them in boxes or circles, and drawing lines with arrows between concepts to show connections. Colour-code your notes with a highlighter so that everything relating to one topic is the same colour.

### ***How can verbal learners help themselves?***

Write summaries or outlines of course material in your own words. Working in groups can be particularly effective: you gain understanding of material by hearing classmates' explanations and you learn even more when you do the explaining.

## **5. Sequential and Global Learners**

Sequential learners tend to gain understanding in linear steps, with each step following logically from the previous one. Global learners tend to learn in large jumps, absorbing material almost randomly without seeing connections, and then suddenly "getting it."

Sequential learners tend to follow logical stepwise paths in finding solutions; global learners may be able to solve complex problems quickly or put things together in novel

ways once they have grasped the big picture, but they may have difficulty explaining how they did it.

Many people who read this description may conclude incorrectly that they are global, since everyone has experienced bewilderment followed by a sudden flash of understanding. What makes you global or not is what happens before the light bulb goes on. Sequential learners may not fully understand the material but they can nevertheless do something with it (like solve the homework problems or pass the test) since the pieces they have absorbed are logically connected. Strongly global learners who lack good sequential thinking abilities, on the other hand, may have serious difficulties until they have the big picture. Even after they have it, they may be fuzzy about the details of the subject, while sequential learners may know a lot about specific aspects of a subject but may have trouble relating them to different aspects of the same subject or to different subjects.

### ***How can sequential learners help themselves?***

Most courses are taught in a sequential manner. However, if you are a sequential learner and you have a tutor who jumps around from topic to topic or skips steps, you may have difficulty following and remembering. Ask the tutor to fill in the skipped steps, or fill them in yourself by consulting references. When you are studying, take the time to outline the lecture material for yourself in logical order. In the long run doing so will save you time.

You might also try to strengthen your global thinking skills by relating each new topic you study to things you already know. The more you can do so, the deeper your understanding of the topic is likely to be.

### ***How can global learners help themselves?***

If you are a global learner, it can be helpful for you to realise that you need the big picture of a subject before you can master details. If your tutor plunges directly into new topics without bothering to explain how they relate to what you already know, it can cause problems for you. Fortunately, there are steps you can take that may help you get the big picture more rapidly. Before you begin to study the first section of a chapter in a text, skim through the entire chapter to get an overview. Doing so may be time-consuming initially but it may save you from going over and over individual parts later. Instead of spending a short time on every subject every night, you might find it more productive to immerse yourself in individual subjects for large blocks. Try to relate the subject to things you already know, either by asking the tutor to help you see connections or by consulting references. Above all, don't lose faith in yourself; you will eventually understand the new material, and once you do your understanding of how it connects to other topics and disciplines may enable you to apply it in ways that most sequential thinkers would never dream of.

This handout is adapted from Felder & Solomon, notes available at

<http://www2.ncsu.edu/unity/lockers/users/f/felder/public/ILSpace.html>