Rapid Skill-Builder®

Learning Styles

Every individual learns in their own way and each will have a unique combination of cultural background and past experience that impact on the way they learn.

However, there are some useful categorisations that can help you determine how you learn. For example, some people prefer to process information through text, while others prefer visual images. Some assimilate information best individually, while others would rather work in groups. Another person may grasp information quickly and intuitively, while someone else prefers to learn step by step and take time to reflect.

This Skill Builder has been designed to raise your awareness of the different learning styles and help you understand why you learn more easily in certain situations than in others. This will also assist you to get the best from future learning opportunities.

Attend

The context in which learning takes place includes a range of factors, from physical comfort to individual motivation or the way the learning material is structured through to the learner's ability (or commitment) to concentrating.

One way to think about this is by acknowledging the different needs people bring to these important factors. At one end of the spectrum are those who are "telescopic". These people can focus on the core message without being too distracted by "interference" or things that seem out of place.

If you are telescopic, you will be able to analyse individual elements of the information you receive. This makes you highly analytical. While this detailed focus can be a strength it can also cause you to miss the wider point, or the application being taught.

At the other end are those whose approach is "wide-angled" – that is, they tend to notice all aspects of the actual learning environment. Again this can be a strength, but if you are wide-angled, you may easily be frustrated by distractions (either physical or mental) when you are trying to focus. You are likely to find that environmental factors such as noise, low light, and other physical influences interfere with the information being shared.

The descriptions provided in the following table will help you determine which of these you are most like.

	Telescopic (55% of people)	Wide-angled (45% of people)
Physical climate	• Are likely to ignore most minor physical distractions without much difficulty. • Will seek to adjust their learning climate themselves wherever possible. • Usually happy to work in any learning design formats and training room design as long as the course leader can be clearly seen and heard.	• Are likely to find all but the most minor noises and interruptions irritating and distracting. • Will expect the course leader to adjust the whole learning climate to be optimal. • Will prefer a comfortable and appropriate learning format and layout with lots of light, air and a room design that is "fit for purpose".
Motivation	• Telescopic individuals are likely to set their own learning goals or objectives and tell others about them. • Motivation is self-generated and paced, and is quickly formed. However, it can just as quickly disappear when not challenged.	• Wide-angled individuals are likely to look for pre-specified holistic learning objectives and goals to be explained early in proceedings. • Motivation is driven by a co-ordinated effort to get the entire learning environment right and not just the content.
Level of concentration	• High if there is a clear link with personal desires or aims but potentially low if too much time is taken in "straying" from the core messages of the learning. • Prefer learning goals and objectives and a clear message on how to reach them.	• High if the complete training "event" is managed as a whole and care is taken to deal with all of the learning "style" issues (not just trying to "process" participants). • Prefer learning to be nurtured in many ways with the most appropriate environment possible.

What Motivates People to Learn?

Learners can be coerced into the classroom – forced to stay put and accept whatever is dished out but they can't be forced to learn. Conversely, learners who see a need or have a desire to know something new will seek out learning regardless of the obstacles put in their path. In fact, most of the part-time and evening adult-education programs and weekend seminars need very little promotion to get widespread interest and attendance.

Immediate need, or application, is the most common motivation behind adult learning efforts, but it is not the only motivation. Some people look for information that will help them cope with change or personal transition. Others are motivated by the promise of increasing or even maintaining their sense of self-esteem or pleasure. Whatever this initial motivation, most learning theorists agree that **there must be some intrinsic interest and curiosity for the learner, which is stimulated further by the trainer or the classroom experience**. The goal is to "tap" into this intrinsic motivation by trying to discover **teachable moments** – those moments in life when a learner truly believes he or she is learning something new and different.

All of this is good basic information for the trainer, but the learner also has to examine his or her own motivation. In determining *your* overall level of learning motivation, consider each of these three factors.

1 Your interest

If the content of a course is of no interest to you, it is unlikely that you will have much motivation. Some people think that their motivation will build up once they get into the swing of the program. However, if you do not believe you need the learning, if it is not a priority, and if the subject holds no curiosity for you, any motivation at all is likely to relate to something other than the subject (like the people you will meet in the course, or the chance to get away from your normal work for a while, etc.).

2 Your ability to persist with the learning

When beginning a big project like digging a garden or painting a room, some people will approach the task with the idea of continuing through until the end without stopping. Others will decide that it can only be done in chunks or by taking breaks. This knowledge about how persistent you are also applies to learning. As a learner you need to be conscious of your own natural levels of concentration and persistence to receive the learning, and look to shape the learning to suit.

3 Your support needs

For most people, the support or props offered for a course are critical if motivation is to be maintained. For example, some people like good notes, some like diagrams and charts to be handed out, and some like videos to be shown. Some learners are quite happy to work or study on their own (such as in distance education), while others need live instructors (sometimes offering considerable facilitation and coaching skills). Consider what your preferences are.

Translate

Unlike the choice between telescopic and wide-angled, which is likely to be "hard-wired", you may be able to successfully learn from a number of different delivery styles (variances in how information is delivered and who helps you to understand it). However, you are likely to have a stronger **preference** for one particular delivery approach.

It is possible to classify all learners into three broad categories that look at who you rely on for receiving information, or learning, and helping you make sense of it. These categories are: "Dependent", "Collaborative" and "Autonomous".

All three learning categories operate as translation modes when looking to make sense of new information or when trying to sensibly acquire different knowledge.

The Dependent Learner

Dependent learners usually prefer teacher-directed information, high structure and clear focus. Lectures or tutorials are likely to be more favoured. Dependent learners tend to like large groups because the learning format has to be more formal or structured.

It is important to realise that being a dependent learner does not mean intellectually dependent. The term is just used to express a preference for being given information as opposed to having to find it.

The Collaborative Learner

Collaborative learners tend to favour discussion-orientated sessions, small group seminars or even project work that can provide a chance for social interaction. Games, simulations, case studies and role-plays are likely to be popular with the collaborative learner.

Collaboration does not necessarily entail joint learning. However it does typically mean that these individuals like to talk with others about the information they have received in order to make better sense of it.

The Autonomous Learner

Autonomous learners prefer to exercise influence over the content and structure of the program, and view the teacher/facilitator as a resource. Guided reading and distance learning are likely to be comfortable formats.

These learners are likely to set themselves personal learning goals or objectives and take personal pleasure in learning (irrespective of the subject).

The table on the following page provides an overall picture of each of these learning styles.

	The Dependent Learner	The Collaborative Learner	The Autonomous Learner
Overall characteristics	Dependent learners prefer teacher-directed information, high structure and clear focus. Lectures or tutorials are, therefore, more favoured. Dependent learners tend to like large groups because the learning format has to be more formal.	Collaborative learners tend to favour discussion-oriented sessions or small group seminars, or even project work that can provide assignments and a chance for social interaction, games, simulations, case studies and role plays.	The autonomous learner prefers to exercise influence over the content and structure of the program and see the course leader/facilitator as a broadly guiding resource. Guided reading and distance learning are therefore comfortable formats.
General likes	• Tutorials • Lectures • Presentations • Bulletins • Manuals • Procedures • Work instructions • Guidelines • Outlines • Summaries	• Seminars • Workshops • Group discussions • Role plays • Think tanks • Brainstorming sessions • Projects • Games • Simulations • Clubs	• Reading • Writing • Distance learning • Simulations • One-to-one counselling • Models • Individual assignments • Loose ideas • Big picture concepts
General dislikes	• Conceptual models • Doodles • Complex charts • Data without notes • Unsupported ideas/ opinions	• Working alone • No interaction • Long lectures • Individual reading • Distance learning	• Technical presentations • Detailed lectures • Policies and procedures • Fixed procedures and work instructions • Workbooks/manuals
	(52% of people)	**(22% of people)**	**(26% of people)**

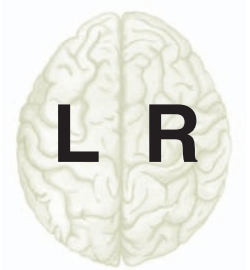
Relate

In basic terms, the human brain is divided into two sections or hemispheres. The left hemisphere is the centre for linguistic expression, while the right hemisphere deals with visual-spatial and holistic thinking. As early as the 1860s, brain researchers ascertained that damage to a person's left cerebral hemisphere resulted in a loss of language function, while damage to the right hemisphere was associated with the loss of visual and spatial recognition.

The findings of this research greatly influenced what we now know about learning styles and developmental theories of human learning. The major educational debate in this area is now centred on the tendency in Western society to emphasise verbal or left-brain development through formal education.

The argument that education has restricted the development of the right side of the brain (the creative side) in favour of the logical verbal-processing left hemisphere is a strong one: language and mathematical ability (controlled by the left brain) are critical. Many experts believe that several of our other right-brained "intelligences" such as musical ability are almost entirely ignored by formal education systems.

- **Logic:** sequence, reason, order
- **Language**
- **Mathematics**
- **Analysis:** evaluation



- **Visual:** colour, images, depth
- **Imagination:** creativity, daydreaming
- **Recognition:** faces, patterns
- **Rhythm:** music, rhyme
- **Dimension scale**

Research has shown that logic, language, mathematics and analytical evaluation capability are strong in 99 per cent of right-handed people and 65 per cent of left-handed people. As a result, many children are assumed to be (or encouraged to be) right-handed by their parents. **Of course, we live in a right-handed and left-brained physical world** (scissors, golf clubs, writing from left to right in most cultures, etc.).

From a learning perspective, the importance of being biased in favour of left-brain learning is that this is likely to lead to preferences for learning through words and numbers, linear or sequential information, and logical and ordered argument. Talks, lectures, book assignments, tables and charts, etc., will all appeal to people with a left-brain bias.

A growing number of writers today seem to be encouraging more right-brained thinking. This is partly because the research and understanding about right-brain functions is more recent and less developed, and partly because educators wonder about the possibilities if the power and creativity of the right brain were used more.

One frequently cited example of a right-brained person is Albert Einstein, whose left-brain traditional learning in logic and analysis was limited because he was expelled from school. Despite this apparent setback, Einstein creatively jumped to devising perhaps the most complex and significant theory ever generated, his Theory of Relativity.

Physiology research conclusively suggests that the right brain is strong on visual images, imagination, rhythm, and dimension space. From a learning perspective, the importance of being right-brain-biased is that this is likely to lead to a preference for learning through analogies and metaphors, images, patterns, non-verbal signals, and music. Diagrams, songs, group exercises, and role plays will all appeal to right-brain dominant learners.

It is interesting to see how left and right-brain biases operate for each of us but the concept of learning styles as being **Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic and Tactual** (or tactile) is more helpful. Note that tactual is usually paired with and called Kinaesthetic.

This thinking more practically applies the brain-bias research by suggesting that getting both sides of the brain to receive information will create endorsement, and therefore greater understanding and recall. A lecture delivering only words will appeal well to the left brain, but have little appeal to the right. Adding a video, group exercise, and a demonstration will help cause the lecture to appeal to the right brain as well.

VISUAL LEARNERS (45% of people) • Will use phrases like: "I see what you mean" or "I get the picture" • Prefer to watch a movie, see a show or read a book • Like talking to people face to face • Forget names, remember faces • If lost or need directions, prefer a map • Reward people with a note, letter or card	**Learn best by:** • Writing down key facts • Visualising what they are learning • Creating pictures/diagrams from what they are learning • Using time lines, for remembering dates • Creating their own strong visual links • Using pictures, diagrams, charts, film, video, graphics, etc.
KINAESTHETIC LEARNERS (25% of people) • Will use phrases like: "That feels right" or "That touched a nerve" • Play games and sport to relax • If lost or need directions, prefer to be shown the way • Reward people with a pat on the back • Cannot sit still for long periods of time	**Learn best by:** • Copying demonstrations • Making models • Recording information as they hear it, perhaps in a Mind Map • Walking around while they read • Underlining/highlighting new information/key points • Putting key points on to index cards and sorting them into order • Getting physically and actively involved in their learning
AUDITORY LEARNERS (30% of people) • Will use phrases like: "That sounds right" or "I hear what you are saying" • Listen to music or radio to relax • Prefer to talk to people on the phone • Forget faces, remember names • If lost or need directions, prefer to be told • When inactive, tend to talk to themselves or others • Reward people with oral praise	**Learn best by:** • Hearing a seminar, presentation or explanation • Reading aloud to themselves • Making a tape of key points to listen to in the car or while they do the ironing • Explain the subject to someone else • Use their own internal voice to verbalise what they are learning

Adapted from *The Learner's Pocketbook* by Paul Hayden.

▼ Understand

Understanding

Understanding characteristics focus on how you like to understand the learning you receive. There are two styles by which most people do this. For those who prefer to do this "Globally", they are likely to take a big picture and conceptual view and broadly absorb information. "Analytical" individuals, on the other hand, are likely to make sense of learning by breaking it down logically and in step by step fashion.

Consider the points in the following table to help you determine whether you tend to be more global or more analytical in your approach to understanding information.

Global	Analytical
Global Strengths • Seeing the big picture • Seeing relationships • Co-operating with group efforts • Reading between the lines • Seeing many options • Paraphrasing • Doing several things at once • Reading body language • Getting others involved	**Analytic Strengths** • Details • Focus • Organisation • Remembering specifics • Direct answers • Consistency • Objectivity • Individual competition • Doing one thing at a time
Global Style • Often more sensitive to other people's feelings • Flexible • Goes with the flow • Learns by discussion and working with others • Needs reassurance and reinforcement • Future-focused and expansive in thinking • Tries to avoid conflict • May skip steps and details	**Analytic Style** • Likes things ordered in a step by step way • Pays close attention to details • Must be prepared • Needs to know what to expect • Often values facts over feelings • Prefers to finish one thing at a time • Rarely becomes personally or emotionally involved • Logical • Finds the facts but sometimes misses the main idea
Global Frustrations • Having to explain themselves analytically • Not getting a chance to explain themselves • Not knowing the purpose for doing something • Having to go step by step without knowing where they'll end up • Not being able to relate what they are learning to their own situation • Having to show the steps they used to arrive at an answer	**Analytic Frustrations** • Having opinion expressed as fact • Not understanding the purpose for doing something • Listening to an overview without knowing the steps involved • Listening to an explanation when all that's needed is a "yes" or a "no" answer • Dealing with generalities • Having to find meaning in all that they learn • Not finishing one task before going to the next
(53% of people)	(47% of people)

Reflect

Actually evaluating what you hear, see or experience is a complex process. Your past history, preferences, biases, skills and many other factors will impact on how you learn.

However, for every person, there is a four step evaluation process that takes place in the brain during learning. These four steps consist of the four categories that have been looked at in this booklet.

STEP 1 Attending

In order to learn, you need to filter out distractions and anything else that will limit your ability to absorb the information. This is about giving the learning opportunity your full attention.

STEP 2 Translating

You need to make sense of the information, in a way that fits with your existing knowledge or concepts of the way things work. In some cases, you may have to unlearn something, before you can encode the new learning so it is meaningful to you.

STEP 3 Relating

The next step is to relate the information to existing patterns or "blocks" of knowledge, in either your short or long-term memory. This is about connecting new information with information you already have stored in your brain.

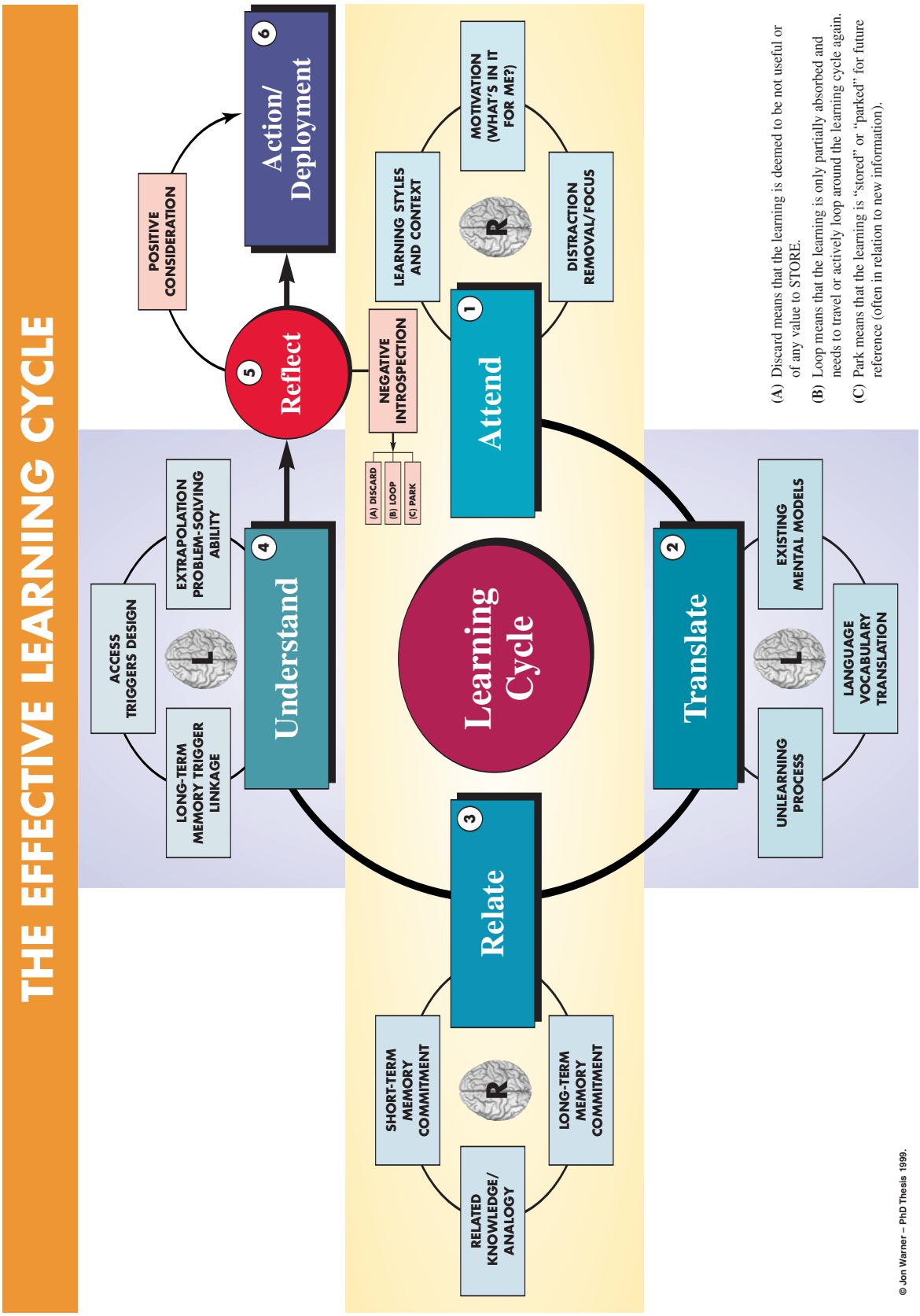
STEP 4 Understanding

The final step is comprehension, or understanding. In this step the new information is summarised, in connection with existing information, and distilled for use when you need it.

Travelling the Cycle

This learning evaluation cycle may be travelled in just a few seconds or may take much longer, if the information is complex or confusing. When you travel the cycle successfully, your "self-talk" or internal reflection is likely to be positive, and you will be ready to apply what you have learnt. If you experience difficulties with any of these steps, your self-talk may be negative or confused, and you may go through the steps of the cycle again until you are able to successfully understand and apply the information.

By considering your style preferences for each of these steps, you will be able to understand how you personally travel this learning cycle. A diagram of the cycle is provided on the following page.



Act

Action is about applying our learning in a real and practical way. In other words, if we have paid attention, translated the information well, related it to what we know appropriately and understood it at a theoretical level, our reflection process is likely to be positive and we can act on it.

Of course, if we can't seem to act on what we have learned in theory, or won't or don't know how, something has gone wrong at one of the earlier stages and we are back at negative introspection again. Hence, the more that we appreciate our own preferences for learning and those preferences of others, the less likely this is to happen.

The learning style theories and concepts discussed in this Skill Builder combine to provide insights into your own learning characteristics. They are designed to help you understand why you learn more easily in certain circumstances than in others, and through that understanding, enable you to adjust your approach to learning and building knowledge in order to make the most of every learning opportunity.

If you are unable to determine from the descriptions provided what your learning preferences are, you will find it helpful to complete a diagnostic instrument, such as the Team Publications **Learning Styles Profile**, which helps pinpoint your learning style by using paired questions.

Whatever method you use to discover more about your learning style, it is worth building your understanding and then applying what you have learnt.

Understanding the styles will not only benefit you as a learner. Take time to consider the implications of the model when you communicate with others, for example, when training a colleague in aspects of your job, or teaching your children to complete a household task. You don't have to be a formal trainer or facilitator to benefit from knowledge of the different learning styles and the awareness that you may need to adjust your approach in order to help others learn.

The Skill Building template on the following page includes a checklist to help you maximise your learning opportunities, as well as a six stage cycle to assist you in working through the different sections covered in this booklet, with a focus on practically applying what you have learned.

Learning Styles Skill Building Template

Act
Apply
Extrapolate
Build

HOW

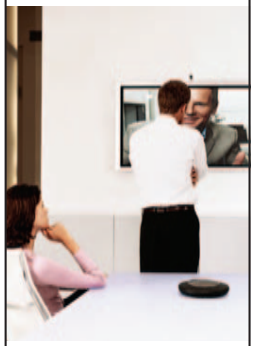
Attend
To context
To motivation levels
To core message

HOW

Checklist questions to help maximise personal learning

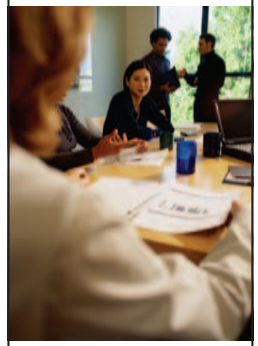
ATTEND	1. Are the mood and environment for the learning appropriate?	
ATTEND	2. Are the methodology and structure of the learning best for purpose?	
ATTEND	3. Am I sufficiently motivated to want to learn? (If not, why?)	
ATTEND	4. What are the learning-delivery styles that work best for me?	
RELATE	5. Am I a Dependant, Collaborative or an Independent Learner?	
RELATE	6. What type of questions help me to learn the most (why, what, how or what-if questions)?	
TRANSLATE	7. Do I tend to be left-brain biased (more interested in learning structure, order and logic)?	
TRANSLATE	8. Do I tend to be right-brain biased (more interested in visuals, analogies, and physical learning interactions)?	
UNDERSTAND	9. Do I think learning should be presented in broad summary, or in detailed form?	
UNDERSTAND	10. What is the best way for me to understand concepts (i.e. by quiet internal reflection, adapting or changing the information, applying or practicing it for real, etc.)?	

Reflect
Positive
Negative
Re-thinking



HOW

Translate
Language
Style
Delivery



HOW

Understand
Core information
Wider applications
When to apply

HOW

Relate
To existing knowledge
To analogies
To linked concepts

HOW