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Assessing Your Own Learning Styles

Andrew D. Cohen, Rebecca L. Oxford, and Julie C. Chi

The Learning Style Survey is designed to assess your general approach to learning. It does not predict your behavior in every instance, but it is a clear indication of your overall style preferences. For each item, circle the response that represents your approach. Complete all items. There are eleven major activities representing twelve different aspects of your learning style. When you read the statements, try to think about what you generally do when learning. It generally takes about 30 minutes to complete the survey. Do not spend too much time on any item – indicate your immediate feeling and move on to the next item.

For each item, circle your response:

- 0 = Never**
- 1 = Rarely**
- 2 = Sometimes**
- 3 = Often**
- 4 = Always**

Part 1: HOW I USE MY PHYSICAL SENSES

1. I remember something better if I write it down. 0 1 2 3 4 2. I take detailed notes during lectures. 0 1 2 3 4 3. When I listen, I visualize pictures, numbers, or words in my head. 0 1 2 3 4 4. I prefer to learn with TV or video rather than other media. 0 1 2 3 4 5. I use color-coding to help me as I learn or work. 0 1 2 3 4 6. I need written directions for tasks. 0 1 2 3 4 7. I have to look at people to understand what they say. 0 1 2 3 4 8. I understand lectures better when professors write on the board. 0 1 2 3 4 9. Charts, diagrams, and maps help me understand what someone says. 0 1 2 3 4 10. I remember peoples' faces but not their names. 0 1 2 3 4

A - Total

11. I remember things better if I discuss them with someone. 0 1 2 3 4 12. I prefer to learn by listening to a lecture rather than reading. 0 1 2 3 4 13. I need oral directions for a task. 0 1 2 3 4 14. Background sound helps me think. 0 1 2 3 4 15. I like to listen to music when I study or work. 0 1 2 3 4 16. I can understand what people say even when I cannot see them. 0 1 2 3 4 17. I remember peoples' names but not their faces. 0 1 2 3 4 18. I easily remember jokes that I hear. 0 1 2 3 4 19. I can identify people by their voices (e.g., on the phone). 0 1 2 3 4 20. When I turn on the TV, I listen to the sound more than I watch 0 1 2 3 4 the screen.

B - Total

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21. I'd rather start to do things, rather than pay attention to directions. 0 1 2 3 4 22. I need frequent breaks when I work or study. 0 1 2 3 4 23. I need to eat something when I read or study. 0 1 2 3 4 24. If I have a choice between sitting and standing, I'd rather stand. 0 1 2 3 4 25. I get nervous when I sit still too long. 0 1 2 3 4 26. I think better when I move around (e.g., pacing or tapping my feet). 0 1 2 3 4 27. I play with or bite on my pens during lectures. 0 1 2 3 4 28. Manipulating objects helps me to

remember what someone says. 0 1 2 3 4 29. I move my hands when I speak. 0 1 2 3 4 30. I draw lots of pictures (doodles) in my notebook during lectures. 0 1 2 3 4

C - Total

Part 2: HOW I EXPOSE MYSELF TO LEARNING SITUATIONS

1. I learn better when I work or study with others than by myself. 0 1 2 3 4 2. I meet new people easily by jumping into the conversation. 0 1 2 3 4 3. I learn better in the classroom than with a private tutor. 0 1 2 3 4 4. It is easy for me to approach strangers. 0 1 2 3 4 5. Interacting with lots of people gives me energy. 0 1 2 3 4 6. I experience things first and then try to understand them. 0 1 2 3 4

A - Total

7. I am energized by the inner world (what I'm thinking inside). 0 1 2 3 4 8. I prefer individual or one-on-one games and activities. 0 1 2 3 4 9. I have a few interests, and I concentrate deeply on them. 0 1 2 3 4 10. After working in a large group, I am exhausted. 0 1 2 3 4 11. When I am in a large group, I tend to keep silent and listen. 0 1 2 3 4 12. I want to understand something well before I try it. 0 1 2 3 4

B - Total

Part 3: HOW I HANDLE POSSIBILITIES

1. I have a creative imagination. 0 1 2 3 4 2. I try to find many options and possibilities for why something 0 1 2 3 4 happens. 3. I plan carefully for future events. 0 1 2 3 4 4. I like to discover things myself rather than have everything 0 1 2 3 4 explained to me. 5. I add many original ideas during class discussions. 0 1 2 3 4 6. I am open-minded to new suggestions from my peers. 0 1 2 3 4

A - Total

7. I focus in on a situation as it is rather than thinking about how 0 1 2 3 4 it could be. 8. I read instruction manuals (e.g., for computers or VCRs) before 0 1 2 3 4 using the device.

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9. I trust concrete facts instead of new, untested ideas. 0 1 2 3 4 10. I prefer things presented in a step-by-step way. 0 1 2 3 4 11. I dislike it if my classmate changes the plan for our project. 0 1 2 3 4 12. I follow directions carefully. 0 1 2 3 4

B - Total

Part 4: HOW I DEAL WITH AMBIGUITY AND WITH DEADLINES 1. I like to plan language study sessions carefully and do lessons 0 1 2 3 4 on time or early. 2. My notes, handouts, and other school materials are carefully 0 1 2 3 4 organized. 3. I like to be certain about what things mean in a target language. 0 1 2 3 4 4. I like to know how rules are applied and why. 0 1 2 3 4

A - Total

5. I let deadlines slide if I'm involved in other things. 0 1 2 3 4 6. I let things pile up on my desk to be organized eventually. 0 1 2 3 4 7. I don't worry about comprehending everything. 0 1 2 3 4 8. I don't feel the need to come to rapid conclusions about a topic. 0 1 2 3 4

B - Total

Part 5: HOW I RECEIVE INFORMATION

1. I prefer short and simple answers rather than long explanations. 0 1 2 3 4 2. I ignore details that do not seem relevant. 0 1 2 3 4 3. It is easy for me to see the overall plan or big picture. 0 1 2 3 4 4. I get the main idea, and that's enough for me. 0 1 2 3 4 5. When I tell an old story, I tend to forget lots of specific details. 0 1 2 3 4

A - Total

6. I need very specific examples in order to understand fully. 0 1 2 3 4 7. I pay attention to specific facts or information. 0 1 2 3 4 8. I'm good at catching new phrases or words when I hear them. 0 1 2 3 4 9. I enjoy activities where I fill in the blank with missing words I hear. 0 1 2 3 4 10. When I try to tell a joke, I remember details but forget the punch line. 0 1 2 3 4

B - Total

Part 6: HOW I FURTHER PROCESS INFORMATION

1. I can summarize information easily. 0 1 2 3 4 2. I can quickly paraphrase what other people say. 0 1 2 3 4 3. When I create an outline, I consider the key points first. 0 1 2 3 4 4. I enjoy activities where I have to pull ideas together. 0 1 2 3 4 5. By looking at the whole situation, I can easily understand someone. 0 1 2 3 4

A - Total

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6. I have a hard time understanding when I don't know every word. 0 1 2 3 4 7. When I tell a story or explain something, it takes a long time. 0 1 2 3 4 8. I like to focus on grammar rules. 0 1 2 3 4 9. I'm good at solving complicated mysteries and puzzles. 0 1 2 3 4 10. I am good at noticing even the smallest details regarding some task. 0 1 2 3 4

B - Total

Part 7: HOW I COMMIT MATERIAL TO MEMORY

1. I try to pay attention to all the features of new material as I learn. 0 1 2 3 4 2. When I memorize different bits of language material, I can retrieve 0 1 2 3 4 these bits easily – as if I had stored them in separate slots in my brain.
3. As I learn new material in the target language, I make fine distinctions 0 1 2 3 4 among speech sounds, grammatical forms, and words and phrases.

A - Total

4. When learning new information, I may clump together data by 0 1 2 3 4 eliminating

or reducing differences and focusing on similarities.

5. I ignore distinctions that would make what I say more accurate 0 1 2 3 4 in the given context.
6. Similar memories become blurred in my mind; I merge new 0 1 2 3 4 learning experiences with previous ones.

B - Total

Part 8: HOW I DEAL WITH LANGUAGE RULES

1. I like to go from general patterns to the specific examples in 0 1 2 3 4 learning a target language.
2. I like to start with rules and theories rather than specific examples. 0 1 2 3 4 3. I like to begin with generalizations and then find experiences that 0 1 2 3 4 relate to those generalizations.

A - Total

4. I like to learn rules of language indirectly by being exposed to 0 1 2 3 4 examples of grammatical structures and other language features.
5. I don't really care if I hear a rule stated since I don't remember 0 1 2 3 4 rules very well anyway.
6. I figure out rules based on the way I see language forms behaving 0 1 2 3 4 over time.

B - Total

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Part 9: HOW I DEAL WITH MULTIPLE INPUTS

1. I can separate out the relevant and important information in a 0 1 2 3 4 given context even when distracting information is present.
2. When I produce an oral or written message in the target language, 0 1 2 3 4 I make sure that all the grammatical structures are in agreement with each other.
3. I not only attend to grammar but check for appropriate level 0 1 2 3 4 of formality and politeness.

A - Total

4. When speaking or writing, a focus on grammar would be at the 0 1 2 3 4 expense of attention to the content of the message.
5. It is a challenge for me to both focus on communication in speech 0 1 2 3 4 or writing while at the same time paying attention to grammatical agreement (e.g., person, number, tense, or gender).
6. When I am using lengthy sentences in a target language, I get 0 1 2 3 4 distracted and neglect aspects of grammar and style.

B - Total

Part 10: HOW I DEAL WITH RESPONSE TIME

1. I react quickly in language situations. 0 1 2 3 4 2. I go with my instincts in the target language. 0 1 2 3 4 3. I jump in, see what happens, and make corrections if needed. 0 1 2 3 4

A - Total

4. I need to think things through before speaking or writing. 0 1 2 3 4 5. I like to look before I leap when determining what 0 1 2 3 4 to say or write in a target language.

6. I attempt to find supporting material in my mind before I 0 1 2 3 4 set about producing language.

B - Total

Part 11: HOW LITERALLY I TAKE REALITY

1. I find that building metaphors in my mind helps me deal with 0 1 2 3 4 language (e.g., viewing the language like a machine with component parts that can be disassembled).

2. I learn things through metaphors and associations with other 0 1 2 3 4 things. I find stories and examples help me learn.

A - Total

3. I take learning language literally and don't deal in metaphors. 0 1 2 3 4 4. I take things at face value, so I like language material that says 0 1 2 3 4 what it means directly.

B - Total

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Understanding your totals

Once you have totaled your points, write the results in the blanks below. Circle the higher number in each part (if they are close, circle both). Read about your learning styles starting below.

Part 1: Part 5: Part 9:

A ____ Visual A ____ Global A ____ Field-Independent B ____ Auditory B ____ Particular B ____ Field-Dependent C ____ Tactile / Kinesthetic

Part 2: Part 6: Part 10:

A ____ Extraverted A ____ Synthesizing A ____ Impulsive
B ____ Introverted B ____ Analytic B ____ Reflective

Part 3: Part 7: Part 11:

A ____ Random-Intuitive A ____ Sharpener A ____ Metaphoric B ____ Concrete-Sequential B ____ Leveler B ____ Literal

Part 4: Part 8:

A _____ Closure-Oriented A _____ Deductive
B _____ Open B _____ Inductive

Note:

Before reading the next section, understand that this is only a general description of your learning style preferences. It does not describe you *all of the time*, but gives you an idea of your tendencies when you learn. Note that in some learning situations, you may have one set of style preferences and in a different situation, another set of preferences. Also, there are both advantages and disadvantages to every style preference.

If on the sensory style preferences (visual, auditory, tactile/kinesthetic) you prefer two or all three of these senses (i.e., your totals for the categories are within five points or so), you are likely to be flexible enough to enjoy a wide variety of activities in the language classroom. On the other dimensions, although they appear to be in opposition, it is possible for you to have high scores on both, meaning that you do not have a preference one way or the other. Here are three examples: on the extroverted-introverted distinction, you are able to work effectively with others as well as by yourself; on the closure-open distinction, you enjoy the freedom of limited structure and can still get the task done before the deadline without stress; on the global-particular distinction, you can handle both the gist and the details easily.

Furthermore, learning style preferences change throughout your life, and you can also stretch them, so don't feel that you are constrained to one style.

Part 1: HOW I USE MY PHYSICAL SENSES

If you came out as more visual than auditory, you rely more on the sense of sight, and you learn best through visual means (books, video, charts, pictures). If you are more auditory in preference, you prefer listening and speaking activities (discussions, lectures, audio tapes, role-plays). If you have a tactile/kinesthetic style preference, you benefit from doing projects, working with objects, and moving around (games, building models, conducting experiments).

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Part 2: HOW I EXPOSE MYSELF TO LEARNING SITUATIONS

If you came out more extraverted on this survey, you probably enjoy a wide range of social, interactive learning tasks (games, conversations, discussions, debates, role-plays, simulations). If you came out more introverted, you probably like to do more independent work (studying or reading by yourself or learning with a computer) or enjoy working with one other person you know well.

Part 3: HOW I HANDLE POSSIBILITIES

If you scored more random-intuitive, you are most likely more future-oriented, prefer what can be over what is, like to speculate about possibilities, enjoy abstract thinking, and tend to disfavor step by-step instruction. If your style preference was more concrete-sequential, you are likely to be more present-oriented, prefer one-step-at-a-time activities, and want to know where you are going in your learning at every moment.

Part 4: HOW I APPROACH TASKS

If you are more closure-oriented, you probably focus carefully on most or all learning tasks,

strive to meet deadlines, plan ahead for assignments, and want explicit directions. If you are more open in your orientation, you enjoy discovery learning (in which you pick up information naturally) and prefer to relax and enjoy your learning without concern for deadlines or rules.

Part 5: HOW I RECEIVE INFORMATION

If you have a more global style preference, you enjoy getting the gist or main idea and are comfortable communicating even if you don't know all the words or concepts. If you are more particular in preference, you focus more on details and remember specific information about a topic well.

Part 6: HOW I FURTHER PROCESS INFORMATION

If you are a synthesizing person, you can summarize material well, enjoy guessing meanings and predicting outcomes, and notice similarities quickly. If you are analytic, you can pull ideas apart and do well on logical analysis and contrast tasks, and you tend to focus on grammar rules.

Part 7: HOW I COMMIT MATERIAL TO MEMORY

If you are a sharpener, you tend to notice differences and seek distinctions among items as you commit material to memory. You like to distinguish small differences and to separate memory of prior experiences from memory of current ones. You can easily retrieve the different items because you store them separately. You like to make fine distinctions among speech sounds, grammatical forms, and meaningful elements of language (words and phrases). If you are a leveler, you are likely to clump material together in order to remember it, by eliminating or reducing differences, and by focusing almost exclusively on similarities. You are likely to blur similar memories and to merge new experiences readily with previous ones. If you are concerned about accuracy and getting it all right, then the sharpener approach is perhaps preferable. If you are concerned about expediency, then being a leveler may be the key to communication.

Part 8: HOW I DEAL WITH LANGUAGE RULES

If you are a more deductive learner, you like to go from the general to the specific, to apply generalizations to experience, and to start with rules and theories rather than with specific examples. If you are a more inductive learner, you like to go from specific to general and prefer to begin with examples rather than rules or theories.

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Part 9: HOW I DEAL WITH MULTIPLE INPUTS

If you are more field-independent in style preference, you like to separate or abstract material from within a given context, even in the presence of distractions. You may, however, have less facility dealing with information holistically. If you are more field-dependent in preference, you tend to deal with information in a more holistic or "gestalt" way. Consequently you may have greater difficulty in separating or abstracting material from its context. You work best without distractions.

Part 10: HOW I DEAL WITH RESPONSE TIME

If you are a more impulsive learner, you react quickly in acting or speaking without thinking the situation through. For you, thought often follows action. If you are a more reflective learner, you think things through before taking action and often do not trust your gut reactions. In your case, action usually follows thought.

Part 11: HOW LITERALLY I TAKE REALITY

If you are a metaphoric learner, you learn material more effectively if you conceptualize aspects of it, such as the grammar system, in metaphorical terms. You make the material more comprehensible by developing and applying an extended metaphor to it (e.g., visualizing the grammar system of a given language as an engine that can be assembled and disassembled). If you are a literal learner, you prefer a relatively literal representation of concepts and like to work with language material more or less as it is on the surface.

Tips for the learner

Each style preference offers significant strengths in learning and working. Recognize your strengths to take advantage of ways you learn best. Also, enhance your learning and working power by being aware of and developing the style areas that you do *not* normally use. Tasks that do not seem quite as suited to your style preferences will help you stretch beyond your ordinary comfort zone, expanding your learning and working potential.

For example, if you are a highly global person, you might need to learn to pay more attention to detail in order to learn more effectively. If you are an extremely detail-oriented person, you might be missing out on some useful global characteristics, like getting the main idea quickly. You can develop such qualities in yourself through practice. You won't lose your basic strengths by trying something new; you will simply develop another side of yourself that is likely to be very helpful to your language learning.

If you aren't sure how to attempt new behaviors that go *beyond* your favored style, then ask your colleagues, friends, or teachers to give you a hand. Talk with someone who has a different style from yours and see how that person does it. Improve your learning or working situation by stretching your style!

***Author's Note:** The format of the Learning Styles Survey and a number of the dimensions and items are drawn from Oxford's Style Analysis Survey, 1995, in J. Reid (Ed.), *Learning styles in the ESL/EFL classroom* (pp. 208-215). Boston: Heinle & Heinle/Thomson International. Other key dimensions and some of the wording of items comes from Ehrman and Leaver's E&L Questionnaire, 2001. For more information on this questionnaire, see the Resources Section of this Guide