

Are You A Looker, A Listener, A Talker Or A Toucher?



Hazel Gale [Follow](#)
Jun 2, 2015 · 18 min read



We're all different. Very different. Your perception is as unique as a snowflake, and that means you move through your very own version of the world. Understanding what kind of communication methods we each are tuned to can help us connect with others better. And it doesn't make us any less individual either...

*More at hazelgale.co.uk, or follow me on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [G+](#).
[Sign up to my mailing list here](#)*

By [Hazel Gale](#), Cognitive Hypnotherapist & Performance Coach.

More at [hazelgale.co.uk](#), or [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) & [G+](#).

You should sign up to my mailing list here

(I don't send stuff often, but when I do it's good)

• • •

Our differing experiences of the world will influence not only our ability to learn and our capacity to do, but also our sense of *who we are*.

When it comes to perception, there are four main categories into which we each could fall. With this article, you can learn your own basic “type” along with how to ascertain someone else’s (and, of course, what you can do with that information).





Unconsciously, we take in an unfathomable amount of information every moment: an estimated two to eleven million bits. Yet, we're only able to

consciously perceive between five and nine bits at a time. It's the job of the unconscious mind to decide which things it filters into our awareness. That is, what we actually see, hear, feel, smell or taste.

To do the maths, let's consider that one “moment” lasts a second (which is already pretty generous). With at least two million different versions of any second available, and sixty different seconds to every minute, that would mean there are up to *2 million to the power of 60* different versions of just one minute's worth of reality.

If you put $2m^{60}$ into Google it'll calculate the answer to be “infinity”. So even with an infinite number of people, living through the same moment an infinite number of times, no two people would ever experience the same minute. Mind boggling, huh? Your personal reality is so unique that even snowflakes have more chances of having a facsimile.





Representational systems (or perceptual means):

There are five main senses (or “modalities”). These are the means by which we can perceive our environment:

V: Visual (sight)

A: Auditory (hearing)

K: Kinaesthetic (sensation and emotion)

O: Olfactory (smell)

G: Gustatory (taste)

Everybody uses all of the senses on a moment-to-moment basis, but the level of importance we each place on the information received through them is different. This affects what gets chosen by the unconscious mind to form that moment's five to nine bits (ergo it affects the reality we experience in any given instance).

The modality that we favour is called our *preferred representation system* (or “rep system” for short). So, if someone favours visual information over the rest, we'd call her a “visual”, if she favoured auditory information, she'd be an “auditory”.

The four rep systems:

Visual

Those who place the most emphasis on information received by means of sight. Visuals think mainly in pictures.

Kinaesthetic

Those who tend to place emphasis on feelings (both physical and emotional). You could say that kinaesthetics prefer to *feel* than “think”.

Auditory (tonal)

Those who place preference on heard information. Auditories think in sounds.

Auditory Digital

Those who prefer to analyse a situation using logic and rationale. These people think in words as if using a voice inside their heads.

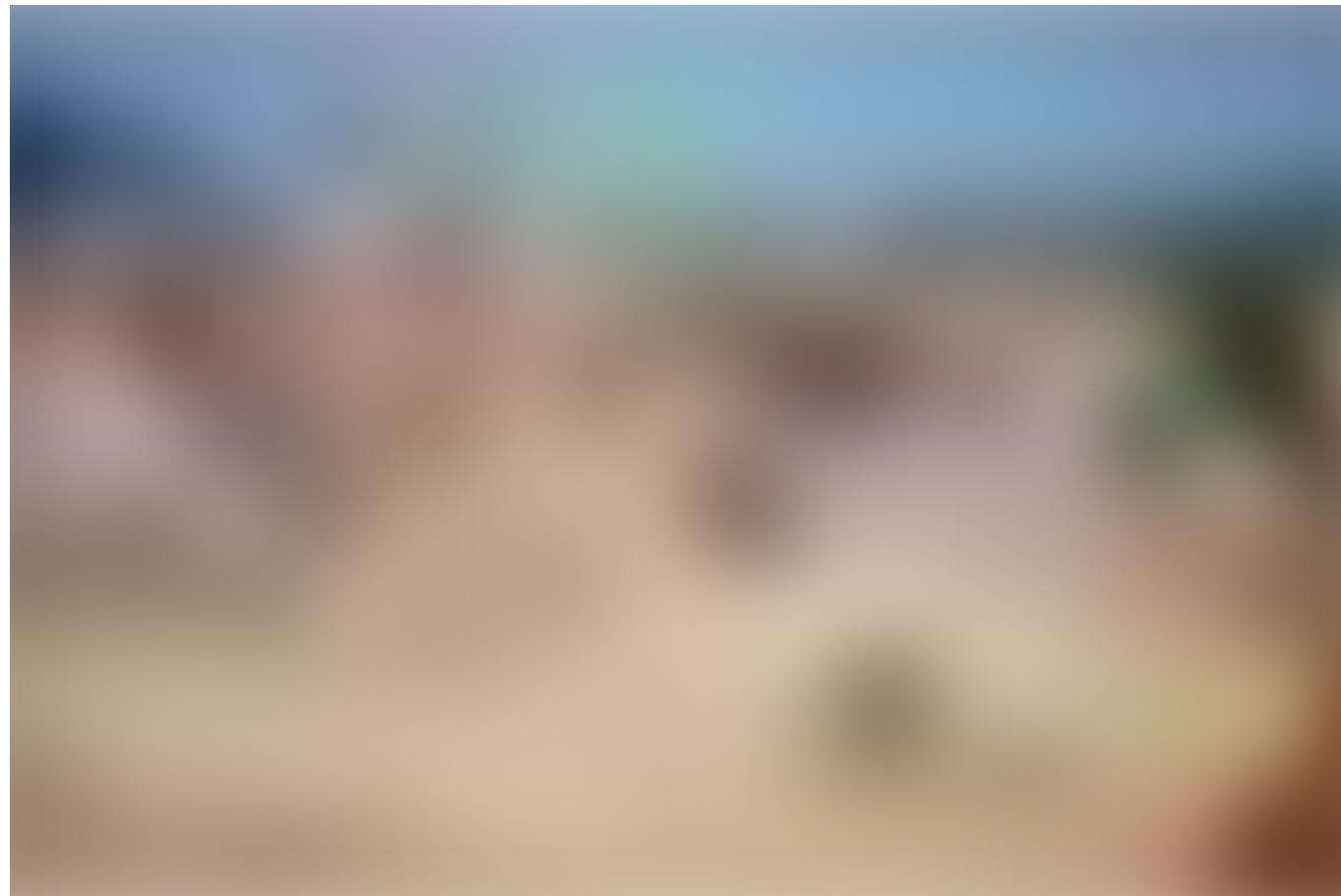
The Flat Liner

It is possible, of course, to not have a stand out favourite at all, but rather to use all the representational systems pretty much equally so I've added this as a fifth category. Some would argue this to be the most versatile position, and therefore potentially a strength.

• • •

Reality

What all these variables mean is that a group of people sitting on the same beach will all experience a different version of that beach, whilst simultaneously feeling as though their version is the (only) reality.



A visual's version of that beach might include a lot of information about the colour and style of people's swimsuits and the way the sun glistens on the water.

His auditory friend could be largely unaware of those things because she is captivated by the sound of the crashing waves and the voices of playing children.

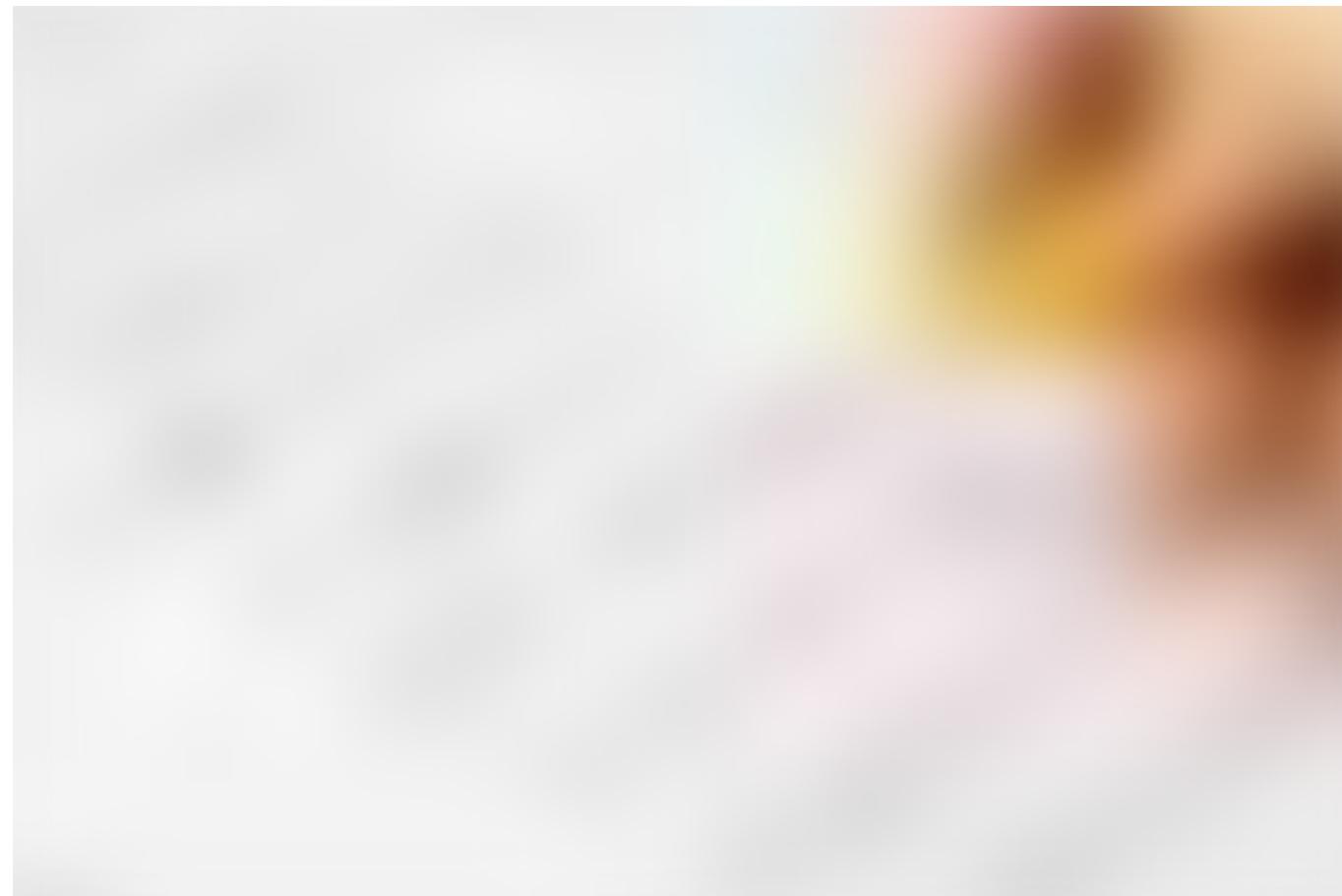
Their kinaesthetic buddy may be off in his own warm world of sunbathing (or perhaps busy building a sandcastle or surfing).

And the auditory digital person could be silently reasoning with herself about any of these things in order to make sense of them.

Teachers are a group of people who tend to be quite aware of this aspect of personality. A good teacher will try to include learning tools across all of the modalities to ensure that everyone in the class will be able to understand the content (which is easier said than done).

I'll go into this a little more later. First, take the test below to ascertain your preferred representational system.

Discovering your type



STEP ONE: Rank each of the statements below with a number from 1–4.

4 = Most accurately describes your preference

3 = Next best description of your preference

2 = Next best description

1 = Least likely description of your preference

At this point, ignore the reference to a, b, c and d. You will be using this information in step two.

1. Generally I make important decisions based on:

a __ which way looks best to me

b __ which way sounds the best to me

c __ review, analysis and consideration of the issues

d __ my gut level feelings, what feels best to me

2. During a heated debate, I am most likely to be influenced by:

b __ people's tone of voice

a __ whether or not I can see the other person's point of view

c __ the logic of the other person's argument

d __ how I feel about the topic(s)

3. During a meeting, I like information to be presented:

a __ in a way that is neat and tidy with pictures and diagrams

d __ in a way that I can grasp and/or that I can get a hands-on experience

c __ in a logical, rational way, so that I can understand

b __ in the form of a conversation, so that we can discuss and I can ask questions

4. I choose to spend time:

b __ listening to music, the radio or talking with people

a __ watching films and/or enjoying other visual arts

d __ doing sport, activities and generally moving about

c __ reading, learning, analysing, using strategy... generally using my mind

5 . I tend to resolve problems by:

a __ looking at the situation and all the alternatives, possibly using diagrams

b __ talking through the situation with friends or colleagues

- c __ analysing the situation and choosing the approach that makes most sense
- d __ trusting my intuition and gut feelings

6. When with my friends:

- a __ I enjoy watching how they interact and behave
- d __ I tend to hug them, or sit close to them, when speaking to them
- c __ I am interested in their rationale, reasons and ideas when talking to them
- b __ I enjoy talking and listening to them

7. I prefer to learn a particular aspect of a sport or activity by:

- a __ Watching how the teacher or coach does it
- d __ Having the teacher or coach adjust my body into the right position
- b __ Listening to explanations, discussing and asking questions
- c __ Understanding the reasons and rationale for doing it in a certain way

8. When at a presentation, I am most interested in:

- c __ The logic and a rationale of the presentation
- b __ The tone of voice and way the presenter speaks

- a __ The visual aids used by the presenter
- d __ The opportunity to get to grips with the content, perhaps by actually doing an activity

Scoring the questionnaire

STEP TWO: Total your scores in relation to the letter assigned to each particular answer (please note that the order of a, b, c and d changes with each question). You should end up with a numerical total for each of the letters.

For example, if your scores for question 8 were as follows:

8. When at a presentation, I am most interested by:

- c. 1 The logic and a rationale of the presentation
- b. 4 The tone of voice and way the presenter speaks
- a. 3 The visual aids used by the presenter
- d. 2 The opportunity to get to grips with the content, perhaps by actually doing an activity.

... then your scores for question 8 would be:

a = 3

b = 4

c = 1

d = 2

Total these up for all 8 questions.

The totals give an indication of your relative preference for each of the four major representational systems:

a = Visual

b = Auditory

c = Auditory Digital

d = Kinaesthetic

• • •

The system with the highest score is likely to be your preferred representational system. Some people will notice that they have one strong

front runner, whereas others will have similar scores for two or more of the senses. Neither is a bad thing, but if you're not strongly in favour of one system then the profiles below may not fit you quite as well as if you had a stand out favourite.

This test is (fairly obviously) not conclusive. It's just a guideline. If you were to consult with an NLP specialist they would be watching your eye movements ([these are called “eye accessing cues” and you can read about them here](#)), and listening for turns of phrase that indicate your preferred representational system.

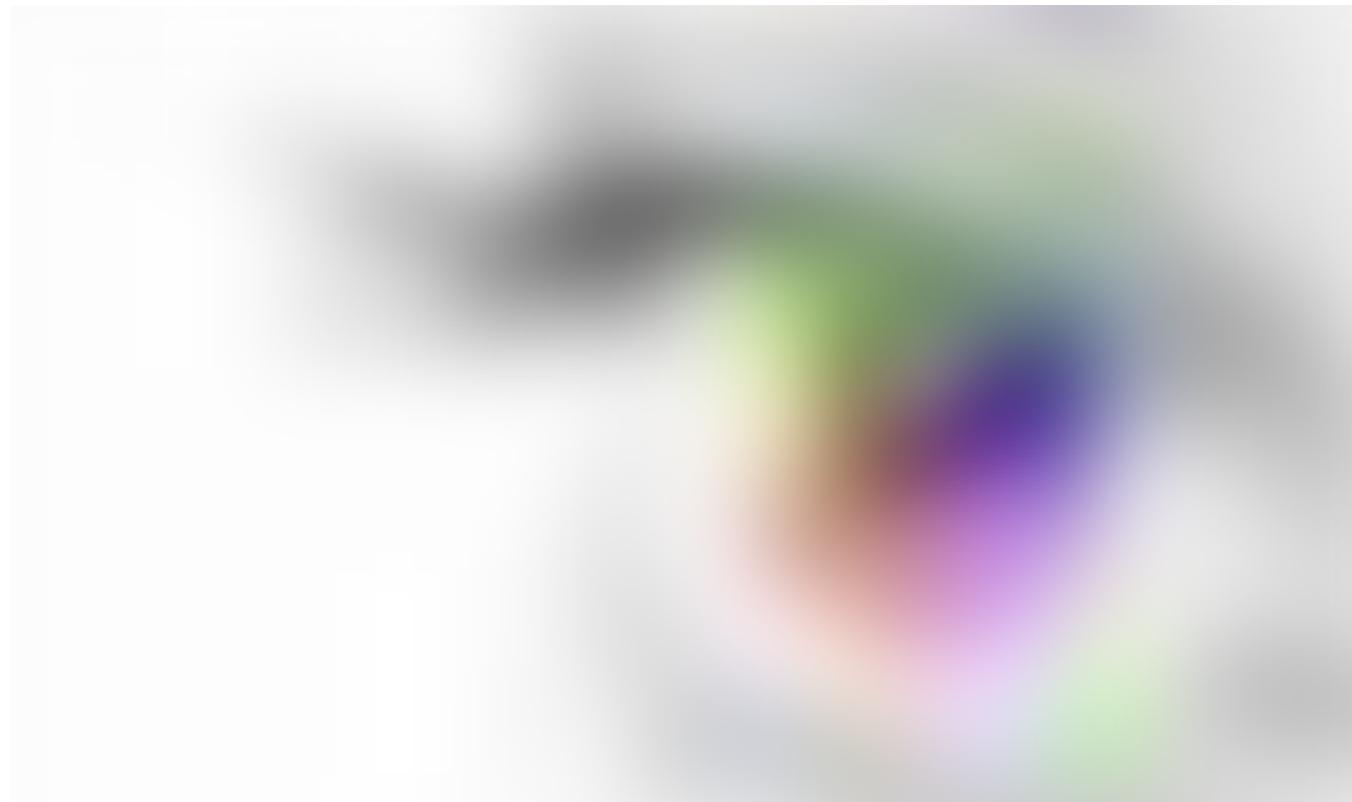
To get a really reliable idea of someone's preferences, one would have to take all of this into consideration during a lengthy conversation. For now though, the test is a great start.

What it all means

The following are examples of stereotypical visuals, auditory tonals, kinaesthetics and auditory digitals.

I've included a few "predicates" for each type. Predicates are commonly used words or phrases that can help you identify the preferred representational system of others.

Again, these are not set in stone. A visual will most probably use predicates from all the rep systems in a conversation, it's just that they'll use the visual predicates more often.



Visuals: (40% of the population)

Visuals pay most attention to what they see. Because there is vastly more visual information available than any other kind, and because it is accessed at the fastest rate, highly visual people can tend to be a little rapid (occasionally hectic).

Visuals speak quickly in order to communicate the information as fast as they are receiving it, and they will tend to breathe more rapidly and shallowly from the top of their chest.

Fairly obviously, visuals find that they are highly aware of the way things look. They might be more sensitive to colour combinations, contrasting shades or and the visual alignment of things. You'll usually find that painters, photographers and other (visual) artists fall into this category.

They'll also be more likely to take pride in their appearance (or at least consider it). They may also place a greater level of importance on the appearance of others (so it really doesn't matter how uncomfortable your best shoes are, if you're on a date or at a job interview with a visual, you really ought to wear them). A visual could be genuinely uncomfortable if forced to wear clashing colours or trousers that are too short, whereas someone with a low visual score might not even notice that's what they are doing.

Visual Predicates:

Because they are thinking in pictures, someone accessing visual information will be likely to say things like: "Looks good", "picture this", "I see where you're coming from". Or use words such as: "clear", "focused", "reveal", "illuminate", "foggy", "dawn" etc.

N.B. If someone with a different preferred representational system is thinking visually, they will also be likely to use visual language.



Kinaesthetics: (40% of the population)

Kinaesthetics will likely be much more sensitive to their physical level of comfort. They may be highly aware of feeling too hot or too cold, of uncomfortable furniture or clothing, and also of the emotional feelings of themselves and others.

Kinaesthetics tend to speak more slowly and deliberately because they are accessing their thoughts via their bodily/emotional understanding of things (which is comparatively slow), and they tend to breathe from lower down in the stomach.

Example:

I don't have a stand alone favourite system personally (I'm primarily auditory digital with visual and auditory just a point or two behind). However, kinaesthetic is pretty low for me so I place a fairly high level of importance on the way things look in my flat and not on how they feel.

My ex boyfriend, on the other hand, was a high scoring kinaesthetic. We had some beautiful cushion covers that I bought abroad and gave to him as a gift when I got home. Of course, I hadn't noticed how "scratchy" they were on the woven side, so for years, we'd battle by flipping the cushions back and forth from soft side up, to pretty side up, and so on... tedious. Needless to say, when he moved out, he left the cushions.

Kinaesthetics usually pick practical things up pretty quickly, and can make excellent sportspeople, dancers or anyone who works with three dimensional space (like sculptors).

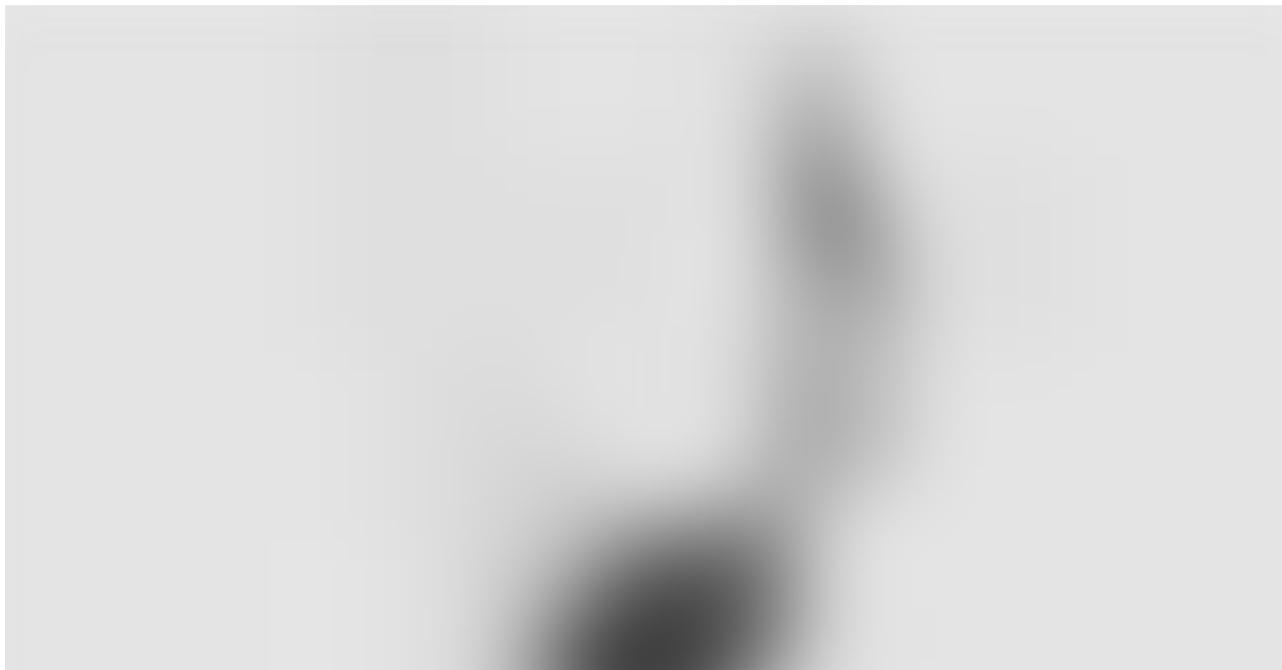
They can, at times, be slow to understand verbal instructions, but if you physically show them how to do something, they'll tend to comprehend it much more quickly (N.B. This would work the other way round for, say, a visual. Being physically shown a dance move might leave them clueless, whereas visually demonstrating it for them could help them to repeat it almost identically).

The educational system is, in general, pretty poor at catering for kinaesthetics (although it's getting better). As a result, adult kinaesthetics

can often suffer from an unjustified lack of confidence in their intelligence having had a rough time at school.

Kinaesthetic Predicates:

Someone accessing kinaesthetic information will be likely to say things like: “We just clicked”, “get a feel for it”, “trying to grasp it” etc. Or use words like: “hard”, “solid”, “concrete”, “scrape”, “touch”, “tap into”... Again, anyone with a different system will occasionally use these terms, it’s just that kinaesthetics will do so more frequently.





Auditory Tonals: (10% of the population)

Auditory tonals (At's) are all about what they hear. They breathe from the middle of the chest and speak at a moderate pace (somewhere between visuals and kinaesthetics). At's can make good newsreaders or other broadcasters because they understand the nuances of communicating through vocal tone and timbre.

Most musicians will have a high auditory score, or if an At is not a musician then music is likely to be important to them. If you're high in auditory but low in visual, you might struggle to read maps, but be able to follow verbal directions much better. You may also find that you're sensitive to the tone of other people's voices as they speak to you.

Consider that we *feel* through all the senses... this is why a visual could be really moved by a painting but left cold by music, and vice versa.

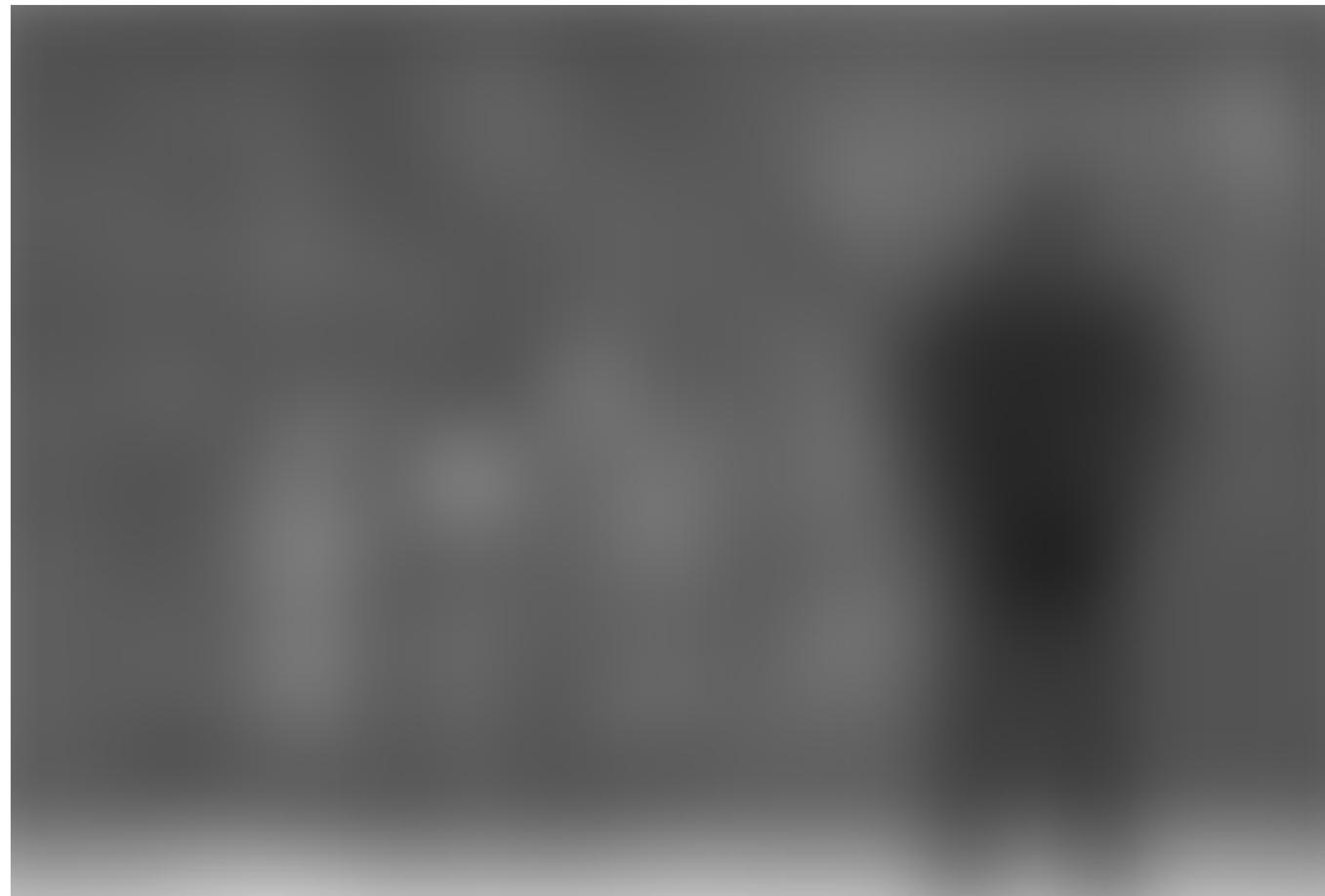
Auditories can be easily irritated or distracted by sounds. Do *not* chew with your mouth open on a date with an auditory (unless you plan to skip desert and go home alone).

Some At's actually need to hear their thoughts out loud to make sense of them. These are the guys who mutter to themselves while writing or solving a problem. It can be hard to stop them talking so don't be surprised if they monopolise the conversation.

If you are a high scoring At, then it can help to use auditory markers to remember things. Saying something out loud can be a lot easier to remember than just an inner command, for example. Or, if you're learning a sport, think about the sound you make when hitting the ball flush, or punching the boxing bag correctly. That sound could contain a whole load of invaluable information about how to improve.

Auditory Tonal Predicates:

People accessing auditory information are likely to use phrases such as: “tuned in”, “we’re on the same wavelength”, “that rings a bell”... And use words like: “listen”, “silence”, “deaf”, “squeak”, “melody”, “harmony”, “resonate” etc.



Auditory Digitals: (10% of the population)

Auditory Digitals (Ad's) think by conducting a dialogue with themselves in their heads. Trevor Silvester (the creator of Quest Cognitive Hypnotherapy) has an interesting theory about how people come to be Auditory Digital:

“From experiencing a lot of Ad clients over the years, and what I have come to understand of my own childhood, I believe that having Ad as the preferred rep system is the result of a decision we made when we were younger. I personally believe it’s the consequence of not liking what we are seeing/hearing/feeling at the time, or over time, so we dissociated from it in order to not get hurt. A client I had was an academic child from a working class family whose parents didn’t know how to deal with his questions, so they would take the mickey out of his intelligence. He went inside because he was all he had to talk to about what he wanted to talk about.”

As an Ad, I can confirm that there is *always* a conversation going on for me. If I'm not speaking to someone on the outside, I am chatting away on the

inside. Typically, I find that I'm explaining things (anything from the next article I plan to write, to how I'm going about running the bath). I do so in minute detail, constantly and repeatedly (it's a riot).

Ad's often have trouble switching off the self-talk at night, and can therefore experience difficulty in sleeping.

They may also come across as cold because they find it harder to access their feelings (they're much more likely to rationalise or analyse themselves rather than experience their emotions fully). For this reason, it can be hard for them to relate to other people's feelings as well (think: Sheldon from the *Big Bang Theory*, or Data from *Star Trek*).

An Ad can infuriate a kinaesthetic in a disagreement by always reverting to logical arguments rather than showing an emotional connection to the topic.

. . .

Ad's will usually be quite adept at analysis, and need to make sense of

things. Because they are forming sentences all the time in their heads, they can make good writers or speakers. Many engineers or people from other analytical/design based jobs will be Ad's.

Auditory Digital Predicates:

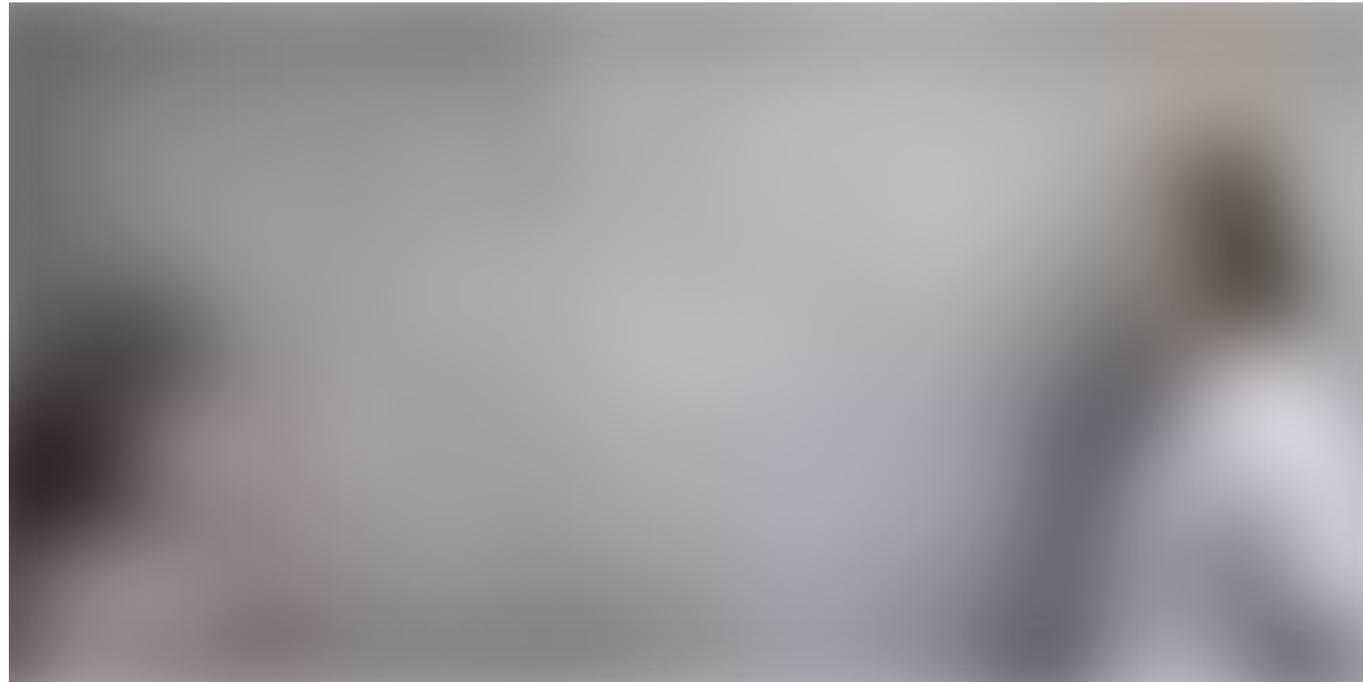
Ad's are a little tougher to spot through predicates because Ad language isn't sensory. They'll be likely to say things like: "Makes sense", "figure it out", "without a doubt", and use words like: "understand", "process", "experience", "know", "think", "sense" etc.

. . .

Don't forget that we will all behave in the ways described above at times. If you're talking about something visual you'll be more likely to speak more rapidly, breathe quickly and use visual predicates. Whereas if you're discussing your emotions you'll probably slow down a little, and possibly get all touchy feely for a bit (unless you're highly Ad and therefore allergic to that, in which case you'll probably be making your excuses to leave).

The power of knowing someone's rep system:

This information makes you a better communicator and teacher. It's as simple as that.



Now that you'll be more aware of these sensory differences, you may well recognise that you get on much more naturally with other people who share your top rep system(s). It's because you are (quite literally) speaking one another's languages.

If you are a high scoring visual, consider a conversation with a super slow speaking kinaesthetic... The type of person whose sentences you want to finish just so you can get to your part of the conversation. Frustrating? Now imagine what it's like for a kinaesthetic to talk to someone speaking so rapidly that they can barely make sense of the words, a little like watching a foreign film whose subtitles are shown too quickly for you to finish reading them. Equally frustrating.

So we need to meet people half way (or fully within their model of the world) if we intend to develop a meaningful relationship with them. This is true on a date, in the boardroom and over the bar at your local pub (there are free drinks to be had for the best communicators).

To help people from other rep systems get the feeling that they “click” with you (or, if you like; “see eye to eye”, “share the same wavelength” or that you “make sense to them”), you can just borrow their language (and their pace) for a while. You could be surprised by the difference this can make. Here’s how.

Rapport building through rep systems:

For visuals:

Speak relatively quickly (though not uncomfortably), in a visual way and use visual predicates where possible. Consider using diagrams if relevant, or imagine painting them pictures with your words.

For kinaesthetics:

If you know someone to be kinaesthetic on the other hand, then you would do well to walk them through things. Slow down a little and make space for a hands-on approach in order to create time for them to access their feelings.

For auditories:

If they are auditory tonal, be mindful of your tone of voice, use auditory predicates, and think about any sounds that might be a part of what you are discussing.

For auditory digitals:

And if they are auditory digital, a solid explanation will usually do. Just make sure you tell them *why* something needs to be done, or *why* it works.

That little nugget of info is probably the most important part of the conversation for them.

N.B. Speech is not the only way to connect with people. See my article on [physiology and body language](#) for more tips on rapport building.

Improving your ability to learn:

Knowing your own representational system can give you much greater understanding and acceptance of your own thought processes. For example, it can be a great relief for an Ad to learn that their inner voice is a perfectly normal way of thinking and not actually “the first sign of madness”. Equally, it can be a relief for a kinaesthetic to realise that they aren’t any less intelligent than anyone else just because they take a little longer to think.

Primarily, this knowledge puts you in a much better position to maximise your capacity to learn. I believe everyone has the potential to take on new information efficiently, it’s just that they need to know how they do it best.

Auditory learning:

If you’re auditory tonal and are having difficulty taking in information from

your notes, then you might find it much easier to speak your notes into a dictaphone so you can listen to them rather than read them. You may also find that audiobooks are far more enjoyable than written ones.

There's a stigma around this stuff, and that comes from the old rigid ways in which the education system used to function. Information is information whether it's spoken or written. You should choose to consume it in whatever way you find the most effective. And how that is says absolutely nothing of your intelligence.

Visual learning:

If you're visual, you'll probably find it helpful to use diagrams, highlighters and coloured pens to help store the information in a visual way. Or, even better, you can remember quite complex sequences by creating a drawing/diagram to represent the different elements and then linking them visually to form one memorable image.

Learning from a video could prove much more effective for you than listening to a talk or reading a book, so if that's available to you then go for your life.

Kinaesthetic learning:

Kinaesthetics can learn much faster when they link the information to physical movement or three dimensional space. Placing notes around your office or living space, or imagining the information spread out along a physical journey that you know well can be a great way to revise kinaesthetically.

If you want to use imagery to remember things when you are primarily kinaesthetic, ensure that the imagery is moving rather than still. This will be much easier for you to relate to and recall.

Auditory digital learning:

If you're auditory digital you'll probably already know that you learn best when you understand the underlying structure of what you're learning. My old Spanish teacher quickly understood (although with a little surprise, I think) that I was much happier to sit and rigorously work through the textbook exercises than to play the visual games she had organised. I also found that learning a phrase verbatim was no good to me unless I knew exactly how each word had been conjugated and what tense I was working in etc.

For Ad's it has to make sense to stick so make sure you find a teacher who can answer all the "why?" questions and you'll be fine.

Finally, your current hierarchy is not final. Your rep system preferences are absolutely changeable. The senses are a little like muscles; if you use them, they'll get stronger. So practice the senses that you feel are your weakest. Developing them could vastly improve your ability to teach, learn and communicate.

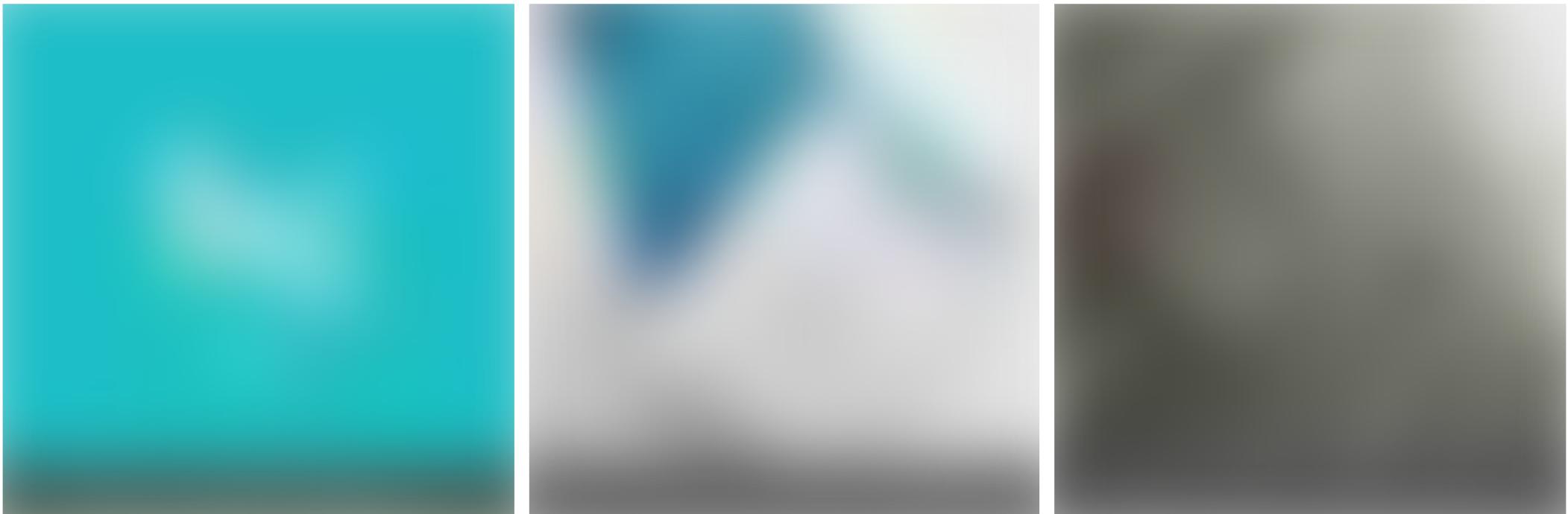
• • •

If you liked this article, please give it a clap to help spread the word!

• • •

For an exploration of the psychology of self-sabotage (and how to take control), take a look at my book, **Fight: Win Freedom From Self-sabotage** (Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton). Available on **Amazon** now.

[Website](#) // [Facebook](#) // [Twitter](#) // [Instagram](#) // [LinkedIn](#) // [Mailing List](#)



Life Lessons

Learning

Psychology

Self Improvement

Self-awareness



245 claps





WRITTEN BY

Hazel Gale

Follow

Boxer-turned-therapist and author of "The Mind Monster Solution" // www.hazelgale.com // Instagram: [hazel.gale.therapy](https://www.instagram.com/hazel.gale.therapy) // Send me a message: hazel@hazelgale.com



The Coffeelicious

Follow

Home to some of the best stories on medium. Look around, relax and enjoy one with a sip of coffee.

See responses (5)

More From Medium

More from The Coffeelicious

Searching for Love After a Thirty-Year

Hiatus

Lisa Gastaldo in The Coffeelicious

Apr 5 · 6 min read ★



218



More from The Coffeelicious

This Is The Antidote For Digital Narcissism

John P. Weiss in The Coffeelicious

Apr 1, 2017 · 10 min read



4.6K



More from The Coffeelicious

How's Jim Carrey Going to End?

Ernio Hernandez in The Coffeelicious

Nov 30, 2017 · 5 min read ★



5.9K



Discover Medium

Welcome to a place where words matter. On Medium, smart voices and original ideas take center stage - with no ads in sight. [Watch](#)

Make Medium yours

Follow all the topics you care about, and we'll deliver the best stories for you to your homepage and inbox. [Explore](#)

Become a member

Get unlimited access to the best stories on Medium — and support writers while you're at it. Just \$5/month. [Upgrade](#)

