

2

Learn Your Nature

Learning is as natural to human beings as breathing, eating, sleeping, playing or procreating. And as far as anyone can tell, we maintain that natural capacity as long as any of the others.

—Ron and Susan Zemke

First consider, what is the matter; and then learn your nature, if you can bear it.

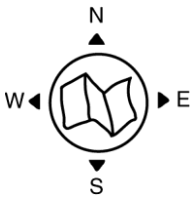
—Epictetus

Learning is a natural process, like breathing in and out. You learn easily, every moment of every day—at work, at home, and while doing things that don't feel or look at all like learning. If I asked you to describe a recent effort to learn something new, quite possibly you would describe at least part of the experience as hard work or frustrating. Why the discrepancy? Perhaps you regard intentional learning as work, while exploring a new interest is fun.

For each of us, learning can be challenging, especially when the materials, the situation, or the person teaching you learn doesn't make sense. The question isn't *whether you can learn*. The question is *how do you learn*, and how do you restore the natural joy of learning to your everyday life in ways that match and support your natural learning style?

The learning styles assessment in this chapter provides you with an opportunity to learn how you'll likely respond under different circumstances and how to attain information in a way that best addresses your own particular needs. It also introduces you to the notion that your learning style spills over into how you communicate with other people as you learn. The more you discover about your natural way of learning, the easier it will be to learn.

If you're already familiar with your learning style and have worked through an assessment prior to reading *Learn More Now*, this chapter also offers specific tips on how to work with other people based on their learning style. Once you understand yourself, introduce the material in this chapter to the people you work with, live with, and spend time with each day. The more that people are familiar with their own natural way of learning, the more you can improve on how you live and learn together.



Road Map to This Chapter

Chapter 2 takes you to the following destinations:

- ▶ Learning about your learning style
- ▶ Mastering simple drawings
- ▶ Creating picture maps
- ▶ Improving your speaking skills
- ▶ Engaging your emotions

Lowdown on Learning Styles

Before we can walk, talk, or write, we are filled with the ecstasy of learning.

—*Bill Samples*

Anytime you begin something new—move to another town, start a new job, take up a hobby—there is something to learn. *Learning styles* refers to the ways you prefer to approach new information. Each of us learns and processes information in our own special way, although we share some learning patterns, preferences, and approaches.

By knowing your individual style, you can adjust your surroundings to make the most of the situation and to master new topics that might otherwise be difficult for you. Understanding your style may help you realize that other people might approach a situation differently than you.

No matter what your style, at a young age, you were probably told by some well-meaning teacher to adjust your style: sit still, be quiet, stop daydreaming, quit doodling, or face forward. This meant that unless you learned best by these means you had no opportunity to engage yourself fully. If you're like most people, you still follow those rules.

Thankfully, even though you prefer to receive information in through one sense more than others, you always take in some information through all of your senses. When one isn't available,

you compensate with another—even though the sensation and effect may not be as strong.

Learning styles assessments classify how people see, hear, speak, and move through the world in order to learn. Whether we rely more on one sense than on another has a tremendous influence on how we interpret new experiences and succeed in what we work on each day.

What's Your Learning Style?

Take a few minutes to complete the following questionnaire to assess your preferred learning style. Begin by reading the words in the left-hand column. Of the three responses to the right, circle the one that best characterizes you, answering as honestly as possible with the description that applies to you right now. Count the number of circled items and write your total at the bottom of each column. The questions you prefer will offer insight about how you learn.

1. Concentrating	Does seeing untidiness or movement distract you? Do you notice things in your visual field that other people don't?	Are you distracted by sounds or noises? Do you prefer to manage the amount and the type of noise around you?	Are you distracted by activity around you? Do you shut out conversations and go inside yourself?
2. Visualizing	Do you see vivid, detailed pictures in your thoughts?	Do you think in sounds and voices?	Do the images you see in your thoughts involve movement?
3. Talking	Do you dislike listening for a long time? Do you often use words such as <i>see</i> , <i>picture</i> , and <i>imagine</i> ?	Do you enjoy listening? (Or, maybe, you're impatient to talk?) Do you often use words such as <i>say</i> , <i>hear</i> , <i>tune</i> , and <i>think</i> ?	Do you like to gesture and use expressive movements? Do you often use words such as <i>feel</i> , <i>touch</i> , and <i>hold</i> ?
4. Contacting people	Do you prefer direct, face-to-face, personal meetings?	Do you prefer the telephone for intense conversations?	Do you prefer to talk while walking or participating in an activity?

5. Meeting someone again	Do you forget name but remember faces? Can you usually remember where you met someone?	Do you tend to remember people's names? Can you usually remember what you talked about?	Do you tend to remember what you did together? Can you almost feel your time together?
6. Relaxing	Do you prefer to watch TV, see a play, go to a movie?	Do you prefer to listen to the radio, play music, read, talk with a friend?	Do you prefer to play sports, knit, build something with your hands?
7. Reading	Do you like descriptive scenes? Do you pause to imagine the action?	Do you enjoy the dialogue most? Can you "hear" the characters talk?	Do you prefer action stories? (Or, maybe don't even enjoy reading for pleasure?)
8. Spelling	Do you try to see the word in your mind? Do you imagine what it would look like on paper?	Do you use a phonetic approach to sound out the word? Do you hear it in your thoughts or say it aloud?	Do you write down the word to find out if it feels right? Maybe you run your finger over it or type it out?
9. Doing something new at work	Do you like to see demonstrations, diagrams, and flow charts? Do you seek out pictures or diagrams?	Do you find verbal and written instructions helpful? Do you like talking it over? Do you ask a neighbor?	Do you prefer to jump right in and try it? Do you keep trying? Do you try different ways?
10. Putting something together	Do you look at the picture and then, maybe, read the directions?	Do you like reading or talking with someone about it? Do you find yourself talking aloud as you work?	Do you usually ignore the directions and figure it out as you go along?
11. Interpreting mood	Do you primarily look at facial expressions?	Do you listen to the tone of voice?	Do you watch for body language?

12. Teaching people	Do you prefer to show them?	Do you prefer to tell them? Write it out?	Do you demonstrate how it's done? Ask them to try it?
Total	Visual _____	Auditory _____	Tactile/ Kinesthetic _____

The column with the highest total represents your primary style. The column with the second-most markings is your secondary style.

My primary learning style: _____

My secondary learning style: _____

Now that you know which learning style you rely on, read the following suggestions to see how you can boost your learning potential while reading this (or any) book.

If your primary learning style is *visual*, draw pictures in the margins, look at the graphics, and read the text that explains the graphics. Envision the topic in your thoughts.

If your primary learning style is *auditory*, listen to the words you read. Try to develop an internal conversation between you and the text. Don't be embarrassed to read aloud or talk through the information.

If your primary learning style is *tactile/kinesthetic*, use a pencil or highlighter pen to mark passages that are meaningful to you. Take notes, transferring the information you learn to the margins of the book, into your journal, or onto a computer. Doodle whatever comes to mind as you read. Hold the book in your hands instead of placing it on a table. Walk around as you read. Feel the words and ideas. Get busy—both mentally and physically.



Are You a Visual Learner?

You can observe a lot by just watching.

—Yogi Berra

If you're a visual learner, you prefer to look at what you're learning. That's because you make sense of, remember, and process easily what you see. Pictures almost certainly help you understand ideas and information better than text or verbal explanations do. When you hear details, you may create mental pictures. When you try to remember something, you may see your own internal movie of what happened. Even when you use words to communicate with other people, you locate those words by describing what you see in your mind's eye.

Although anyone with reasonable eyesight, no matter his or her learning style, takes in images faster than words, and finds that pictures create an instant impression, visual learners regard this method as more efficient than any other.

Rather than listen to what someone says, you may find yourself watching the speaker. Telephone conversations might be difficult because you're so accustomed to getting visual cues from people while they talk. To learn, don't just stare at a page. Move your body and your eyes to heighten your visual perception and your comprehension.

If you're a visual learner, you might wonder why you don't enjoy reading more. After all, books require you to look. Few visual learners I know are avid readers because most people process written information by hearing themselves say the words, not by creating a mental picture of what the words say. This process is more similar to an auditory learner's, rather than a visual learner's style.*

I learned that my husband, Karl, is a visual learner while we were dating. He has an encyclopedia-like knowledge of the animal world. My friends and I would try to stump him with questions about obscure animals or seemingly little-known facts, but he almost never missed a question or an opportunity to show off what he knew. This seemed odd to me because everyone I knew who specialized in seemingly little-known facts read all the time, and I'd never seen Karl read more than a weekend newspaper.

One day I asked him how he had learned so much about animals. He explained that Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom* was one of few television shows his parents let him watch while he was growing up. Each Sunday his family gathered around the television to watch host Marlin Perkins wrangle with exotic animals from around the world. While my family watched the show, too, I didn't remember all those facts and I didn't take a lifelong interest in wild animals. Karl has a vivid recollection of these shows because he is a visual learner who takes in information best through from what he sees.

Mack, a photographer and web site architect, jumps up during meetings to draw on a flip chart or whiteboard. He is checking to see whether he has gotten the message or if the picture in his minds' eye represents what other people see. Frequently it matches; sometimes he finds it doesn't. After years of asking people to explain or describe something again, he is more apt, now, to ask for a picture, or draw one himself. He has accepted that he needs pictures as much as other people need words. Now his specialty is to help companies use pictures to bring greater meaning to words.

Woodleigh almost flunked out of school because she drew pictures instead of writing or reading her assignments. She never did find a way to succeed in academia, but she has managed to turn things around—and now makes her living writing and illustrating beautiful children's books.

When Kavita, a visual communicator and the illustrator for this book, begins a new project, she cleans all the surfaces in her work area. She says the visual clutter distracts her from getting started on new projects. Once she does begin, she posts her images on the walls to be able to see

* A small number of dedicated readers see words as pictures and are considered "visual text learners."

them from all angles and perspectives.

Tips for Visual Learners

These tips will help you learn from what you see. Write your favorite tips in ornate letters on a sticky it note and post it on your refrigerator door, the front of your journal, or your dresser mirror—anyplace that you see each day. Draw symbols and pictures all around the borders to help bring these words to life.

Add visual images. When you see a useful diagram, a sketch, a schematic, a photograph, or a flow chart, cut it out and put it in your journal or in a folder marked GREAT IMAGES. Intersperse these into your reading materials to clarify a point.

Create charts. When you see a percentage written out, draw a pie chart beside it to visually grasp its meaning.

Ask for pictures. When someone explains something to you, ask the person to supplement their words with a picture. Even a line drawing on a paper napkin can help you understand key themes.

Doodle in the margins. Make book margins and your journal a canvas to sketch pictures of what you read. You don't need artistic skills. Simple sketches can help trigger the message as effectively as a detailed image. Draw what you see when you reflect on the subject.

Read what suits you. Seek out authors who use colorful and visually captivating language. Novelist Michael Crichton, for instance, did a terrific job with the visual details of *Jurassic Park*, so that many of his readers understood what the dinosaurs looked like even before they saw the movie.

Use visual materials. Seek out instruction from videos, movies, and demonstrations rather than books or text-based websites. Magazines illustrated with strong photography will often prove useful, too.

Working with Visual Learners

If you work with a visual-learner, these tips can help you draw their attention and see what you're trying to convey.

Draw it out. Sketch a picture or a diagram when you need to elaborate. The picture doesn't have to be complicated or finely detailed, although it should show the connections between concepts.

Use colorful speech. Use language to paint pictures. Use colorful adjectives that focus on the senses. Tell stories to show what you mean.

Create visual interest. Gesture as you speak. Wear interesting jewelry or colorful clothing. Do what you can help visual learners focus on you as you talk.

Add images. Boost people's retention by including drawings, graphs, and charts in any handouts or reports you create. When you deliver a presentation, don't waste words on your slides. Instead, use images to supplement what you say.

Look through their eyes. In our word-based society, visual learners may not feel appreciated or understood. Take time to draw with them, envision with them, and see things through a new and colorful perspective.

Are You an Auditory Learner?



We spend the first twelve months of our children's lives teaching them to walk and talk and the next twelve years telling them to sit down and shut up.

—Phyllis Diller

There are two types of auditory learners—auditory listeners and verbal processors.

The most common type of auditory learner, the auditory listener, learns by listening to other people and may even carry on mental conversations and resolve problems by thinking back on what people have said. The less-recognized type of auditory learner, the verbal processor, likes to say what he or she is thinking.

If you're an *auditory listener*, you listen intently to the world around you and glean meaning from sounds, intonations, and words. Constant noise or startle sounds such as sirens and bells, may distract you. For the most part, you understand what people are saying to you and tend to gravitate toward opportunities where you can listen to other people talk. You also may enjoy books that give you a chance to hear the story in your *mind's ear*.

As an auditory listener, you're at an advantage in a word-based society, but even you can become overwhelmed with so much information coming at you.



If you're a *verbal processor*, you may know intuitively that until you say something aloud or at least move your lips, you're not quite certain of your thoughts or their implications. In meetings or in classes you may repeat back what the facilitator has said and may feel a need to offer your thoughts and comments, too. You're probably not trying to be disruptive and wish other people would realize that talking helps you to learn.

Verbal processors are at a disadvantage in a society where polite people speak only when spoken to. This makes it even more imperative for verbal processors to understand their own learning style.

Carisa, a management consultant, can recite back an entire news segment she heard several days ago on National Public Radio. An auditory listener, much of the information she retains is material she has heard, whether in conversation, on the radio, or on television—even if she's listening from another room.

Jim, a writer and community leader, spends his morning reading the newspaper and then adds another dimension to what he has read by listening to the news on the radio. By using two different auditory techniques together, he remembers more and can use one method to help him focus on the other.

Angie, who runs a small family business, talks her way through nearly every meeting. She even talks to herself at the grocery store. A classic verbal processor, she keeps track of details and figures what needs to happen next by giving voice to her thoughts. She sometimes has trouble with colleagues, who doubt her abilities, because they assume she talks to herself because she's nervous. Actually, she talks more when she's comfortable, and talking helps her to understand situations in more meaningful ways.

Tips for Auditory Learners

The following tips will help you learn from what you hear and say. Post your favorite tips where you can read it each day, or share the idea with people you spend time with so that they can repeat it back to you.

Choose words. Don't rely only on reading—ask people to explain things to you. When you hear their words, you might notice subtle nuances that will help you glean additional meaning.

Read nonfiction books on tape. Even though books on tape may seem like a dream come true for auditory listeners, you might find that the pace of some fiction books is too slow to enjoy. Nonfiction, however, especially for books that are difficult to understand in print, may prove to be helpful and more enjoyable to listen to because you can hear the author's inflections and tone.

Layer your listening. Because you assimilate information well through your ears and by hear-

ing your own thoughts, you can benefit by putting the two techniques together. Try listening to someone talk about a subject, then read or talk more about it, and vice versa.

Use closed captioning. If you live in a family of television watchers, but don't seem to enjoy it as much as everyone else, turn on the closed caption setting so that you can read along with the programming.

Use notes to summarize. In a class or a meeting, taking thorough notes during a talk can interfere with your ability to hear what's important. Whenever you can, write during pauses or breaks and aim only at summarizing the key points, instead of trying to write out every detail.

Order conference tapes. Many conferences record keynote speeches for conference attendees and offer tapes to people who didn't attend the event. You can order these talks from the organization that sponsored the conference or from the service that does the taping.

Use words to trigger memories. When reviewing your notes, let the words trigger the memories of what you heard and play back the voices in your thoughts. Try to hear again the way the speaker said something. Where was the emphasis? What was skipped over?

Read off paper, instead of a screen, whenever possible. There is a fundamental difference in how your eyes and your brain process information on paper and onscreen, so your ability to comprehend, understand, and use the information is not equal. That's because most computer screens refresh at rates based on electromagnetic design, not on the visual operating system of your brain or the rate your eyes blink. As your screen pulses, you think you see a constant uninterrupted screen, but you don't.

Tips Especially for Verbal Processors

If you're a person who learns best by hearing your own voice, read the following techniques aloud.

Talk it through. Talk through the steps as you do something on your own. Read the instructions aloud as you go through the steps.

Pace yourself in meetings. Develop a pattern of first listening to other people and then talking about what you can do with the information. If you talk constantly, you won't have an opportunity to take in anything new.

Use the mute button. On conference calls, use the mute button on your telephone any time other than when you have a key point you make. This way, you can verbalize everything

you're thinking without everyone else on the call hearing you.

Repeat what you have heard. Summarize what you've heard from other people to test whether you understood. Repeat telephone numbers as you hear them. Restate a person's name when you're introduced.

Find other people like yourself. In workshops or meetings, sit with other verbal processors (preferably, off to the side, where you don't distract other participants) so that you can talk with one another throughout the program.

Tape yourself. Capture your thoughts and ideas with a tape recorder, but don't be so concerned with listening to the tape afterward—your own talking is what's important. The recorder doesn't even need to hold a tape. People around you will think you're talking for some special reason—and you are: so that you can learn.

Talk to yourself. Talk through what you think, but first let people around you know that you're talking to yourself whenever they hear you speaking in incomplete sentences.

Write it down. Write out your questions and comments during a time when you must be quiet, for instance, while someone else is talking. Later, meet with the speaker for a one-to-one conversation so that you can engage more fully with what he or she said.

Read aloud. Whether you're reviewing a simple memo, a book, or even a newspaper, read it aloud to yourself. Hearing your own voice is the key to taking in the information.

Working with Auditory Learners

If you work with auditory learners, use these tips to help them hear your message.

Talk together in real time. Find opportunities to talk in person to auditory learners, rather than relying on e-mail or voicemail alone to communicate your ideas.

Especially for auditory listeners: Listen closely. Auditory listeners may not talk much, but when they do say something, it's probably important to them.

Especially for verbal processors: Let them talk. For this type of person, verbal processing isn't idle chatter. Find ways to support, rather than interrupt, their conversational style. Encourage talkative people work together so that they can learn together.

Connect on the telephone. When you need to engage a verbal processor and can't talk in person, hold a conversation by telephone.

Share your concerns. If the commentary of the verbal processor is disruptive, gently let them know that their talking distracts you. Ask them to find other ways to express themselves during particularly inappropriate moments—maybe by writing down their comments. At the same time, work hard to create an environment where their style is honored and appreciated.



Are you a Tactile/Kinesthetic Learner?

We were all eager in one way or another to fix the message in our bones and our muscles.

—*Raffaella Brignardello*

If you're a tactile/kinesthetic learner, you incorporate information through touch and movement. As a result, you may not thrive in traditional work environments because there aren't enough opportunities to hold things or move around.

You probably make statements like, "Enough talking and looking. Let's get our hands dirty." In school, classroom discussions and written materials probably frustrated, you, but you most likely caught up and even jump ahead during lab time. Tactile/kinesthetic learners find it useful to role-play, participate in cooperative games and simulations, and work at hands-on projects.

How does this process work? The tactile system, prompted by receptors in the skin, gives us information about the size, the shape, the texture, and the temperature of what we touch. The kinesthetic system, activated through receptors in our tendons and muscles, responds to movement. Your kinesthetic system recognizes, for example, when you're about to fall off a curb or when a dance sequence you're practicing hasn't been properly performed.

Years ago, I was trying to help a group of software engineers understand how information moved across the Internet. When I realized that these computer-savvy people weren't grasping this confusing concept through words or pictures, I borrowed several empty soft drink cans that lined a nearby window ledge. We pretended that these were data packets as we moved them along the hallway to show how information flowed.

That helped some people get the concept, but it didn't help everyone. We eventually had the engineers themselves act as packets—each of them moving in different directions around the room. That made the concept clear to the rest of them. These simple actions allowed everyone to grasp the similarities between information moving along the Internet and people moving around the room.

Jay, a marketing executive, learns as he moves around. At conferences, he takes pictures because his camera keeps him at the center of the activity. "Walk with me," he says, as his colleague briefs him on the way to a meeting. He also takes in information through his eyes or ears—however, he learns best when interacting physically.

Faye, an energetic realtor, loves her job most when she is walking around houses, running her hands over the walls, or touching the upholstery of a couch. Although she learns a little from her

clients when they set up their appointment on the phone, she knows she will understand them better when they walk around a home together.

Ramona and Anya took a break from an all-day strategy session to walk around the block and get some fresh air. Once they started moving, they gained a new perspective on the subject of their meeting. Walking helped them to work through a problem they couldn't seem to resolve while seated at the conference table.

Austin's thoughts were elsewhere when he attended a class where he had to sit quietly and be still. His tone changed, however, when Tinker-Toy-like ZOME tools were placed on the floor for building models. While other people continued talking, he sat on the floor and began putting the pieces together—literally and figuratively. At that point, he was doing more than simply paying attention, he was finally seeing and understanding.

Judy has wanted to buy a travel outfit from a catalog for a long time but still hasn't been able to bring herself to do it. She makes her best decisions about clothing when she walks among the outfits at the store, feeling the fabric, holding clothes up, and setting them beside each another. Without the ability to move around or touch the materials, she doesn't feel secure in her decision or learn enough to make a choice she knows she'll be happy with.

Tips for Tactile/Kinesthetic Learners

These tips will help you get a feel for how to move with things you want to learn. You, too, can writ your favorite tips on a sticky note, then post it on the leg of your trousers. Glance down at it every time you walk. Hang a note to yourself on a mobile that swings from the ceiling of your office or kitchen, or tape it to a ball that you bounce up and down during the day.

Move around more. Practice walking around and reading at the same time to see if that helps you concentrate on the reading in a new, more powerful way. (Begin by getting up now and walking around while you read these tips.)

Find a new toy. Play with Silly Putty, a rubbing stone, or a stress ball to help reduce tension and keep yourself focused.

Take notes. Highlighting text and taking notes will get your arm moving and put your hands in contact with the meaning of what you read and write.

Use a mobile phone. Get a wireless telephone with a headset so that you can walk around as you talk. There are also new models of wireless headsets that will let you use your regular telephone but give you a wide area to roam.

Write, draw, and doodle. Doodle or make notes during presentations if you can't easily move around, walk, or pace. Merely putting pencil or pen to paper will bring you new insights.

Write big. Create outlines and plans on a chalkboard, a white board, or chart paper. Bigger is better because you'll engage more of your body as you write.

Hold and flip. When you want to memorize something, write a key word or question on the front side of an index card and a hint of the answer on the backside. Flip the card as you try to remember the message or work through the problem.

Working with Tactile/kinesthetic Learners

If you spend time with tactile/kinesthetic learners, use these tips to move your message.

Try talking less. Tactile/kinesthetic learners can get bogged down by elaborate instructions and fancy pictures. Offer structure, but don't go overboard with your explanations.

Get moving. Take a walk together, toss a ball back and forth, build models together, or simply move things around.

Give them a model. Tactile/kinesthetic learners like working with physical objects they can see from different angles.

Let them learn by trying. Tactile/kinesthetic learners are ready to work through things, even if they don't know what to do next or how it will turn out. They usually figure things out as they go along.

Be patient. Tactile/kinesthetic learners are, by definition, movement-oriented. Be patient with their tendencies to wander around, play with and try things, and frequently tap a finger, bounce a foot, or rock back and forth. They're doing this to help themselves learn.

When thinking about styles, try to think of them broadly, remembering none of us learns in only one way. Also, when you have a choice about which mode to use, choose more than one. Consider writing and reading, doodling and writing down words, saying aloud what you write down, and looking at pictures while describing what you see. When you access information through several senses, you retain it in more than one part of your body and your brain.

Take Action with Learning Styles

Life is the art of drawing without an eraser.

—John Gardner

I encourage you to work through these activities as you discover how your learning styles influence your life. Each exercise is short and straightforward, and will help you apply what you've learned in this book to what you do in the real world.

Adjust Your Approach

This first exercise can help you figure out how to apply what you've discovered about learning and motivation. Begin by making a list of topics you find yourself talking about with other people.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Then insert the topics on the lines below as you consider different ways to approach the topics with different people.

How might I approach the issue of _____ with _____ who is goal-motivated and prefers an auditory approach?

(Example: How might I approach the issue of writing an article with Samantha who is goal-motivated and prefers an auditory approach? I might want to begin by explaining to her what's in it for her, and then talk her through the details, deadlines, and diagram requirements.)

How might I approach the issue of _____ with _____ who is learner-motivated and prefers a tactile/kinesthetic approach?

How might I approach the issue _____ with _____ who is relationship-motivated and prefers an auditory approach?

How might I approach the issue _____ with _____ who is goal-motivated and prefers a visual approach?

Learn to Draw

Because almost everyone benefits from seeing things, I find it helpful to know how to draw simple shapes that convey meaning. If you're nervous about your drawing ability, remember that no

one expects you to be an artist. You're learning the basics so that you can make your point with a few simple lines.

Take some time now to practice drawing. In the following space, draw a person, a place, and a thing, similar to the pictures shown.



Now, draw a picture of something that will remind you of what you read in this chapter. It might be someone looking at a picture, watching television, or even drawing.

Improve Your Speaking Skills

Even if you're not an auditory learner, you can benefit from saying things out loud. That's because putting your thoughts into words forces you to focus on your situation. Speech is a tool that gives you greater awareness of your actions and makes it easier to adjust your approach.

It's curious how people tend to leave out what they already know or understand when they talk to themselves. We speak short phrases and incomplete sentences to ourselves because what we say reflects our thoughts, which are, in themselves, incomplete. Most people tend to rely less on talking to themselves as their understanding improves.

So, go on—start talking to yourself! Next time you want to memorize a poem, recite it in a dramatic voice. Edit your writing by reading the text to yourself. Talk through a problem to find the solution. Or see if a story in the newspaper is much more interesting if read aloud.

Tell the book three differences between a traditional auditory learner and a verbal processor. (Yes, go ahead and talk to the book.)

- 1.
- 2.

What Changes Over Time?

We are all the same age inside.

—Gertrude Stein

People in my workshops frequently ask whether learning styles change over time. Because they are body-based, they change with your physiology, which doesn't change all that dramatically after certain stages of growth. What changes are your senses. As these become more refined, you grow into your strongest preferences, and as your senses degrade, you adjust, compensating with senses that are still sharp.

For example, most preschoolers tend to prefer tactile/kinesthetic approaches, partly because their gross-motor skills have developed the most. As children fine-tune and develop skills for writing, reading, speaking, and even visualizing, their natural learning preferences emerge. Auditory skills develop around the second grade, and visual skills mature around the third grade.

In contrast, as adults begin to lose their eyesight, they become less dependant on images to take in information. If their hearing decreases, they try to relate to their environment more through sight or movement. If you're not able to reach out and touch something, you begin to compensate by using your other senses.