



# Little and Learning

A Brief Guide to Understanding  
the Perceptual Modalities of Learning Styles  
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**H**istorically, “to train a child,” meant that the **process** was emphasized and the **child** was adapted to the process. In recent years, education has undergone a paradigm shift (has begun to think about “training” differently). This new paradigm emphasizes the concept of **understanding the individual child**. An important understanding has resulted:

*Individuals develop learning preferences that stay relatively constant throughout their lives. We call this their “learning style.”*

Children have learning preferences (much like being right-handed or left-handed) that they favor throughout their lives. One of the most influential factors in a child's learning is the sense (hearing, sight, touch, experiential) through which a child learns most effectively.

This research has led educators to examine at least 21 factors that could play a vital role in the development and learning of some children. Experiment after experiment revealed that when a child was having difficulty learning or adapting, if the teaching style was altered to closely match the child's preferences, the learning and behavior significantly improved.

## Auditory

Auditory children learn through hearing. They perceive their world through the sounds that come at them. These students will listen attentively (unless they are familiar with the information, at which point they will most likely become bored). These learners rarely take notes, and do not ask for a written copy, map, or pictorial presentation. The auditory teacher will use auditory language to communicate, saying, for example, “Is everyone listening?”



## Visual

Visual learners process information through sight. These children “see” their world. They will notice the class decorations, and will be enthralled with videos, TV, books, pictures, etc. They will notice what people wear, colors, and designs. They will watch what

you do. The visual teacher will use visual language, such as, “I need everyone's eyes on me.”

## Tactual

Tactual learners explore their world through touch. For the children to grasp new and difficult information, they need to “get in touch” with the concept. For example, if you were trying to teach the child the difference between “soft” and “rough,” they would need to be presented with a piece of cotton and a piece of sandpaper. Feeling and comparing would bring about quick, effective learning. Another aspect of tactual learners is their need to “feel good” about what they are learning. Whereas some children may not care if the information pertains to them, some tactual children find this an important aspect of the process. The tactual teacher will communicate tactually, such as, “Are you all grasping this information?”

## Kinesthetic

Kinesthetic students prefer large body movement while learning, or they will prefer to actually experience the material. Large body movement would mean that for these children to grasp information, they would have to act it out, (i.e., run in place while thinking about the concept, use their bodies to become a “storm at sea). To experience learning,

these children need to walk through the process for new and difficult information. For example, if you were making chocolate chip cookies, just hearing the instructions would not teach these children. Seeing the instructions will not make a lasting impression, just as touching a cookie will not help them learn. These children need to make cookies. The kinesthetic teacher communicates kinesthetically, such as, "Are you all getting into this?"

Young children tend to favor a multi-modal approach to learning.

Indeed all senses should be stimulated to encourage a full range of skills in the developing child. However, understanding the perceptual modality preference will help teachers understand the choices of some of their more difficult students.

The learning style of a child is as individual as his or her fingerprints. I can not begin to say that each classroom will need to meet each student's needs. That would not be possible and not healthy for the developing child who will have to learn to deal with incongruencies in life. What I can

encourage is that as you deal with a difficult child, or the child who does not "fit in," does not cope well, or is labeled as "difficult," you would take into consideration the elements that you have some control over. Moreover, while you look at these elements, decide if there's anything that you can do to help this child be a success.

Our role as Christian educators is to fulfill Christ's commands to make disciples. We *can* learn effective ways to do this.

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### Questions For Further Study—

1. What steps can you as a team leader take to make your ministry team more effective in addressing the learning preferences of children in your congregation?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. As a teacher, how would you address the learning needs of:
  - a. an auditory learner?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - b. a visual learner?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - c. a tactual learner?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  - d. a kinesthetic learner?