



4 Different Learning Styles: The VARK Theory

Want to become a more effective learner? Discover VARK theory - the 4 different learning styles that explain how we process and understand new information.

Over the past century, much interest in the subject of [Psychology](#) has been around education. Understanding the different learning styles and being able to better identify how people can learn best has been at the forefront of research, with many theorists projecting their ideas.

One of the most prominent was developed by Neil Fleming in 1987. Named the **VARK model** of learning, Fleming theorised that we are all one of four main types of learners: visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinaesthetic.

Understanding our brain's [psychology](#) and how we best process information is one of the most crucial building blocks for educational success. Not only does it make day-to-day learning easier, you'll also find the time you spend revising is far more effective and rewarding.

Outside of the classroom, VARK learning styles can also be used to explain the behaviours of your relatives and friends, helping you to better understand those around you and make more effective decision-making.

In this guide, we're going to take a look at the four different VARK learning styles, discover how to assess what type of learner you are, as well as how you can use your learning style to benefit your online classes.

The VARK learning styles

Although educators have known for centuries that students have their own individual learning styles, it wasn't until the 1970s and 1980s that these began to be systematically recognised and understood. In 1987, educational theorist [Neil Fleming](#) set out to help students and teachers adapt their practices to better help them retain new information. And so, he created the **VARK learning styles**.

The acronym "VARK" stands for **V**isual, **A**ural, **R**ead, and **K**inaesthetic - and refers to the different learning styles we as humans have when learning new information. Individuals are identified by the style they identify with the most when learning.

What are the 4 types of learning styles?

Fleming categorised learning into 4 different types of learning styles. These are: **V**isual, **A**ural, **R**ead/Write, and **K**inaesthetic. Let's learn more about them in detail:



1. Visual Learners

Do you find yourself drawing pictures of chemical bonds as you study for an exam? Do you sometimes find yourself distracted in class, but are extra-attentive when watching videos or demonstrations? If so, then you may be a visual learner.

As the name suggests, visual learners understand and retain information best by **seeing**. They would prefer to see information presented in a visually appealing way, rather than in a written format. Individuals that learn in this way tend to pay close attention to detail and body language, and often imagine situations in their mind to help them process the information better.

In terms of learning, graphic displays are most effective for visual learners. Some of these include:

- Charts, illustrations, graphs and diagrams
- Animated videos, documentaries, and other learning shows
- Paper hand-outs with lots of images
- Demonstrations
- Colour-coded notes, incorporated with plenty of white space



2. Aural Learners

Do you have that one friend that remembers *everyone's* names and birthdays? Or who can recite every snippet of conversation they've had with someone and relay it back to you?

Aural - or auditory - learners tend to learn information best by **hearing** it. Rather than getting actively involved in class or writing out notes, they prefer to listen to others present the information and then are usually able to recite that back to them.

This is usually through the format of conversation but can also include recordings and music. Some learners also find that reading information out loud to themselves can help them recall it better.

Because of the need for auditory learners to listen intently to lectures or information, it's vital that they are able to study in a quiet environment, away from distractions and any other noises which could distract or disrupt their learning.

However, once they've found the peace and quiet to study, some of the best ways to study which benefit aural learners include:

- Lectures or large classroom environments, where [tutors](#) present information
- Transcribing handwritten notes into recordings
- Listening to podcasts, audio books or class recordings
- Personal, [one-on-one tutoring](#) where new information can be talked through

- Using mnemonics, listening to or creating songs about new content



3. Reading (and Writing) Learners

We've all had note-envy; those students who have beautifully hand-written, colour-coded notes that have been divided perfectly topic-by-topic. And it's because they tend to benefit most from **reading** and **writing** about new information.

Those with a preference for reading and writing learning styles tend to take in new information best when it's displayed as words and text. They'll often produce lists, read definitions, and enjoy summarising information in ways that best make sense to them.

In this way, reading and writing learners tend to understand and memorise new information best by:

- Reading textbooks and summarising with notes
- Writing notes in class and highlighting important details
- Creating presentations
- Studying alone, avoiding all distractions
- Story-writing and getting creative with their notes



4. Kinaesthetic Learners

Finally, the fourth VARK learning style refers to kinaesthetic (or tactile) learners. That is, individuals who learn best by **practically** touching and doing things.

Hands-on experience is an important component for kinaesthetic learners, who have a “trial and error” approach to their learning. They enjoy having physical practice and directly manipulating objects and materials to better understand how things work. Usually, movement and short bursts of studying are important to keep them engaged, rather than sitting at a desk for sustained periods of time.

In this respect, kinaesthetic learners tend to enjoy and thrive at more practical-based subjects, such as Art, Sports, and Design and Technology. They are most engaged while moving, therefore it makes sense to try to incorporate an activity into studying, even if it’s for a subject that requires a more traditional note-taking approach.

Some study methods kinaesthetic learners can try include:

- Conducting experiments and constructing projects
- Doing a ‘physical’ activity whilst learning - e.g. walking and reading a textbook or bouncing a tennis ball while reciting information
- Creating flash cards and being tested by a friend or classmate
- Taking regular breaks during studying to stretch their legs

What type of learning style is right for me?

In order to identify and understand what type of learner people are, Fleming developed a [self-report inventory](#) that presents a series of scenarios. Individuals select from a multiple-choice selection of answers the one that best describes their preferred approach to learning.

At the end of the questionnaire, your scores for each learning style are added up. The learning style which you selected the most when answering is then considered to be your learning preference.

Example VARK Question

Imagine you are learning to assemble a piece of flat-pack furniture. In which way would you be able to assemble the furniture best?

1. Look at diagrams which show each stage of assembly. (Visual)
2. Listen to advice from someone who has done it before. (Auditory)
3. Read the full written instructions that come with the furniture. (Reading)
4. Watch a video of someone assembling the furniture and then trying it for yourself. (Kinaesthetic)



The disadvantages of VARK learning styles

Although the VARK learning styles have been widely regarded as helpful for students who have a better understanding of themselves and how to direct their studying, it has also faced some criticism - with the largest being the limitations of categorising learning in this way.

Despite one learning style making it easier for you to study, it can in some ways be a hindrance. What if you struggle to learn a particular subject using a specific learning style? It can often lead you to feel as though you'll never be able to understand the information - rather than thinking another approach might work better.

Or perhaps, what if you don't fit the conventional VARK model? How can you be an 'effective' learner if you don't necessarily fit one specific style?

Fear not.

So, although the VARK learning styles may be a great way to better understand how best you learn, it's important to play around with different study methods to see which works best for you. Especially when approaching different subjects. Kinaesthetic learning might be great for helping you understand how gravity works, but it might not be so helpful for poetry analysis.

Trying a combination won't only help you improve your concentration and study motivation, but you'll also become a more effective learner, spending time on the activities that are going to help you achieve the most impact.

When it comes to revising for your exams, especially when revising for tests, no matter what test it maybe, you want to ensure that you're studying in the most productive way possible. Revision time is scarce, and you want to make sure you're making the most out of any study time you have.

Using VARK learning styles to benefit online learning

Over the past year, learning has faced unprecedented challenges, with students, teachers and tutors alike having to find new and adaptive ways to make learning effective remotely.

For students, having an understanding of the learning style which best suits them is one of the crucial building blocks to ensure they are still able to study effectively, while learning online.

Still studying at home? Now is the perfect opportunity to explore your learning style and find a new study method that works for you.

We work at a pace that suits you and your schedule. And with this, you have the opportunity to try out some new study methods to see what learning style best suits you.

Think you may be more of an auditory learner? Ask your tutor if they would be willing to record your webinars and send them after class for you to listen again? Alternatively, if you think you're more of a visual learner, you could take your notes from online class and then spend your independent study time condensing them into easily digestible diagrams and illustrations.

Then, as you return to the classroom (or even if you continue to study from home) you'll be a far more effective learner, equipped with the tools and study methods needed to help you learn in the most rewarding way possible.

Here at Option2Drive DITAC, we use a combination of learning approaches to benefit students of all different learning styles and abilities.

For example, in our [driver training](#) students will learn in small online classes and in-car training where they can join in on discussions and learn new material from their trainer (reading, writing, and auditory).

This can incorporate all different learning styles, depending on what suits you best - and your trainer will be happy to accommodate this as part of your training course.

However, like our online courses, trainees will also be asked to complete independent assignments and projects during their training to monitor how well they know and understand this new information. Your trainer can work with you and your learning style to set projects tailored around your specific learning style - making it work in a way that benefits you.