



There's Actually No Such Thing as Different 'Learning Styles', According to Science

No Sharon, you're not a "visual learner".

BI LINDSAY DODGSON, BUSINESS INSIDER
5 APR 2018

When I was at school, a fair amount of time was put into determining our "learning styles." Teachers told us that some people learn better visually with pictures, whereas others retained information by reading or making notes.

To be honest, I never worked out what mine was.

In a survey, [96 percent of teachers were found to believe in learning styles](#). But it turns out this theory is nonsense.

According to experts on the topic such as Harold Pashler and Doug Rohrer, there is very little scientific evidence that [different methods of learning](#) impact a person's academic results.

In fact, a lot of research, such as this study [published in the journal *Lea Differences*](#), has found that learning styles are probably a myth. Ad

A new paper, [spotted by BPS Digest](#) and [published in the journal *Anato*](#) what the researchers call the "nail in the coffin" for the theory.

[Researchers from the Indiana University School of Medicine](#) recruited 1 students to take part in the study.



It involved them taking one of the most popular online learning style surveys, called [the VARK](#), which determines whether someone learns visually, by listening, through reading and writing, or by doing practically. Then they were enrolled in an anatomy class.

Students then studied the way that was consistent with their learning style, and the researchers later surveyed them about their methods (to see if they were actually keeping up with their "dominant" methods).

At the end of the year, the researchers looked at whether it had any impact on the students' end of year grades.

Results showed that there was no real correlation between the dominant learning style and grade performance. In fact, 67 percent of students failed to study in the way they were supposed to be best at anyway.

Those who did study in line with their learning style didn't achieve better grades than the others.

Overall, regardless of their learning style, practising microscope work or looking at lecture notes were the most effective for the students. Flash cards weren't as helpful.

In the paper, the researchers conclude that the idea that "I can't learn subject X because I am a visual learner" should be put to rest.

"This research provides further evidence that the conventional wisdom about learning styles should be rejected by educators and students alike," they wrote.

Being too simplistic in your approach to learning is probably damaging.

If someone dismisses other types of learning because it is not their "dominant" style, they may be doing themselves a disservice in ignoring their weaknesses rather than facing them.

This doesn't mean that the idea of different methods of learning have to be dismissed entirely. [Some evidence has found](#) that novices learn from examples, whereas people experienced in an area get more from problem solving.

Also, [combining activities such as drawing alongside studying](#) has been shown to improve learning.

The problem is that people are pretty bad at working out their own learning style, and there are hundreds of different methods. It is likely more nuanced than simply saying "I learn visually".

So if, like me, you never really worked out your ideal way of learning, don't worry, because you probably don't have to.

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