



# The Five Ways of Learning

There are five ways that people learn. Here they are, in order of popularity: **Verbal, Visual, Tactile, Kinesthetic,** and **Aural.**

**Verbal** people need to put everything into language. These are the copious note-takers (that is, in college; in earlier schooling, most Verbals' needs are addressed in the classroom and they often seldom study and still manage decent grades) and will even copy their own notes over. These people are not the ones who put nasty yellow highlighter all over their books, but they ARE the ones who write (nearly) as much in the margins and on the flyleaves as is on the pages of the book itself. Verbals tend to paraphrase things back to people, not so much to verify that they've understood but because they need to translate into their own language in order to truly understand. Most people are Verbal or have a smattering of Verbal. Verbals can be found in most professions. You can't recognize them by talkativeness, though. Verbalism is a learning style and not a presentation style.

**Visuals** make pictures of things in their heads. They draw on the whiteboard while they talk, they make symbols for things on their notepads, they think in terms of a timeline rather than a list of dates, and they highlight salient bits in the books they read. Visuals don't need to be told why this bit of code differs from that bit—they can SEE the difference. Visuals find patterns on pages—that's why they use the highlighter and why they don't need comparisons detailed for them. Where Verbals are happy to have something new described to them, Visuals need to be shown. Visuals give directions by landmarks and don't necessarily know the names of the streets or programs or methods. Visuals can be found dominating professions where insight is useful, like technical management, marketing, research and development, and entrepreneurship.

**Tactiles** need to touch things. These are the risk-takers; it's not that they bungee jump, it's that they need to dive right in and try things rather than have it described or shown to them. Tactiles are quite likely to take things apart in order to see how they work, and they'll insist on "driving" when they want to show you something new on the computer or when you show them something new. Tactiles often make logical leaps about how a project will evolve because they find building blocks among the premises and construct the thing in their heads. Tactiles learn early to be intuitive about how things work because, for the most part, schools are directed at Verbals and Visuals. The most common trait for mechanical engineers and those wow-style coders is to be predominantly Tactile. You definitely want the guy who works on your car to be a Tactile.

**Kinesthetics** need to manipulate things. These are the people who need to take two things and add them to two other things to know that there are four things. Kinesthetics don't like to work with theory or hyperbole as much as they like to take physical objects and change them. Kinesthetics have the hardest time in school because they need to make the changes to words and objects themselves rather than watching the teacher do it. Kinesthetics who have a scientific bent are likely to be drawn to the physical sciences where the changes they effect are apparent. People who are Kinesthetic are almost always also Tactiles.



## The Five Ways of Learning

**Aurals** remember everything they ever heard or read. These people seem to have an encyclopedic knowledge, because something their second grade teacher said is still vividly recollectable. Aurals seldom understand that other people don't have this magnificent memory and often assume that other people are either not as bright as they are or are deliberately placing obstacles into an obvious path. Aurals often studied hard, even in grammar school, but once they learn something, they own it forever. You definitely want your doctor to be an aural.

There's no way to tell what style people learn in from listening to them, although you can sometimes ferret it out by reading their writing or having them teach you something. Sometimes, even people who know about the five ways of learning think they're one type but manifest all the indications of another. It doesn't matter much, really, unless they're trying to write educational materials.

It's useful to identify which way you learn so that you can make sure the other ways are attended to in your writing. If you're a Tactile, for instance, you'll write excellent step lists or code, but you might have trouble providing context for why someone would follow it. If you're an Aural, you'll have a hard time providing building blocks so that other people can follow complex ideas. If you're a Verbal, you're so used to information being directed at you, you might have to deliberately remember that other people learn less verbally and provide contrived interruptions to your text to allow resting places for less verbal people.

Of course, most people are combinations. I'm a Verbal with a strong Tactile bent. That means that I'll take things apart—that's almost the only way I can learn things—but I'll reassemble them verbally. I might quote the professor in the notes I take in class, but when I copy the notes over, I'll put it in my own words and combine it with something else. I usually come up with all my most interesting questions when I'm copying my notes over, because I need to interact with the language to truly understand it. I suppose that's why I enjoy editing so much.