

Is Your Child A Visual, Auditory, or Kinesthetic Learner?

By Jim Wiltens

I was in the eighth grade when I had one of those adolescent revelations--it involved a fight in Ms. Fowler's English class. Two boys had just entered our class. One boy retrieved a book from under a desk. The other student walked over and claimed it. They stood there looking at each other like two terriers over a steak. Then things got interesting. One student shoved the other and grabbed the book. In the ensuing tussle, red faced, Mrs. Fowler struggled to pull the boys apart. She exited the room, a shirt collar clenched in each of her white knuckled fists. The rest of the class stared after her. Returning to the room, she had a surprise. "What you just saw was staged. You are reporters and I want you to write an eye-witness account of what happened."

My revelation came in the reading of the resultant narratives. Some students described everything they saw in detail. Others could quote dialogue verbatim. And others concentrated on all the feelings that were evoked. Each student had painted widely varying pictures of the fight. *Everyone didn't view the world the way I did.*

One of the most influential factors on your children's perspectives, and ultimately their ability to learn, is related to how they input information.

Children have different ways of taking in information. These modes are labeled visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. Visual processors take in information best by observing diagrams, pictures, models, and seeing the real thing. Audio processors prefer listening to an explanation and discussing what they are learning. Kinesthetic processors need hands-on projects that involve manipulation and physical movement.

If you provide information in the mode your child is most receptive to, your child will feel more competent, learn faster, and have greater retention.

So how do you determine your child's preferred learning style? One method is to listen to your child's choice of words. Children choose words based on their preferred learning mode. In the following sample dialogues you will meet three children. One is strongly visual; one, auditory; and one, kinesthetic. The underlined words are the keys that indicate the mode the child is in.

Visual. Marsha's nice. Whenever she sees you she smiles. It's good to have a friend who can brighten up your day. And she stays focused on the good stuff. Like when I got a haircut that made me look like Lord Fauntleroy, she told me she'd seen a hat in Macy's with these black bows that would look hip with my haircut. She drew me a picture of it. I went to scope it out.

Auditory. Marsha's nice. She always says the right thing. Like I got this haircut that made me want to scream. But Marsha says that my haircut just needs a little help and she told me about a hat at Macy's. She tuned out all my negative vibes and asked if I wanted to go to the mall. It sounded too good to be true.

Kinesthetic. Marsha's nice. I always feel good when she's around. She always gives you positive strokes when you're down. The other day I got this haircut that made me want to crawl under a rock. It really stank. Then Marsha put an arm around me and dragged me to Macy's. We get there and she plunks this hat down on my head. It transformed me into a knock-out.

Discovering a child's preferred learning mode requires more than a cursory *Reader's Digest* condensed quiz. Pay attention to a child's conversation in a variety of situations over several

weeks. Unlike the samples given, children rarely use visual, auditory, or kinesthetic words exclusively. You will hear a mix, but there is often a pattern that indicates preference.

Knowing a child's preference, an adult would be encouraged to communicate with a child in this mode. For example, a history teacher would benefit visual learners by spending less time lecturing and more time showing historical photos, providing film clips, and visiting a museum to look at displays. This doesn't mean you ignore the other modes of input. In the classroom, a teacher is best advised to make sure that visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modes are employed. This guarantees that every child's needs are met.

The first two paragraphs of this article were written with a slant towards one mode. Can you determine if it was visual, auditory or kinesthetic?

I used to think that everyone read a book the same way I did. My perspective changed when I asked a group of people the following three questions:

1. Do you say the words inside your head as you read?
2. Do you automatically see pictures as you read?
3. Do you mouth the words as you read a book?

Individuals who think predominately in terms of images will read a book and see a string of pictures. People who think more with their "ears" will hear the words in their head, pictures are secondary. People with a need for physical involvement often move their lips while reading because it puts them in touch with the book.

Jim Wiltens is the author of No More Nagging, Nit-picking & Nudging (A Guide to Motivating, Inspiring, and Influencing Kids Aged 10-18), available for \$9.95, Audio Tape is also available for \$11.95; Goal Express (Five Secrets of Goal-Setting success) available for \$9.95 from Deer Crossing Press 690 Emerald Hill Road, Redwood City, CA 94061.

For more information go to www.jimwiltens.com

J:\pcs\chcare\r&r\handout\Sept02

