

To Learn or Not to Learn

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All students are interested in something. Whether it is music, numbers, nature, or words, we all have a way of processing and remembering what we care about. There are probably as many learning methods as there are people: some find it easier to memorize facts with songs or at a crowded café rather than at home alone, while others need silence to focus and prefer the safety of their offices or bedrooms. Some must write things down again and again, while others need to discuss ideas out loud for the information to sink in. It is claimed that one can tell a lot about people by the way they study.

The most common type of students are the kinaesthetics, those poor restless souls who cannot learn without wiggling their toes and fingers or marching at the beat of their drums (literally) as if revising for an exam was the equivalent of preparing for a marathon. “Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn,” said Franklin; this is the motto for the kinaesthetic learners. Somehow the less it resembles studying, the more they learn: a page of history is grasped better while pacing around the room, and mathematics can be solved more easily by drumming on the desk. One cannot help admiring their enthusiasm while at the same time wondering whether it is truly necessary to act out World War 1 in order to memorize the information.

In a rather similar point of view stand the visualizers, who would rather die than use a book that lacks colors or pictures. Scanning the pages of the summary after having carefully selected a color for each subject would be enough for a visualizer to have everything memorized. Theirs is the art of transforming exam preparation into an arts-and-crafts session, in which even the humblest margin becomes a museum of doodles. Show them another student’s notes -messy, tragically unhighlighted, ink all in one shade of dull black or basic blue- and watch them recoil in horror, as if confronted with barbarism.

On the other side of the bench are the auditories. These individuals must hear everything, preferably narrated in their own voice. They read essays aloud to themselves, sing their vocabulary lists to the tune of maybe nursery rhymes, and record their own explanations only to play them back later and cringe at their own voice (the curse of the 21st century). Their main delight lies in the TED talk, a modern invention which, when listened to at 1.5x speed, convinces them that the information has been acquired in half the time. If he was alive, Van Gogh could never fit this category.

The logicals, sworn enemies of the other three groups, are gods of structure, capable of distilling Shakespeare (with all his legacy) into a mere flowchart. Their principal tools are lists, graphs, and formulas; their mortal enemy is improvisation. Unlike their peers, they are not seduced by the distractions of cafés or podcasts. Instead, they find transcendence in spreadsheets and the elegance of a well-placed bullet point. They are probably the ones who create study plans or methods step-by-step.

When it comes to learning, any method will do, for they all help in their own way. All learners bring their own unique approach to the table, and each method can be valid and effective in the right context. Thus, those who claim that students will not be able to learn if they are not sitting at their desks with their books and notes at hand, the logicals, will criticize those who are more free-spirited and prefer unorthodox studying methods, regarding them as “sloppy”. Personally, I take an in-between position; of course, it always depends on the subject and the situation. For instance, maths requires logic, studying the structures and patterns of the figures, like the visualizers, that will assign a color for each

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equation. The kinaesthetic might prefer walking through a garden to spark creativity, like the auditory learner might listen to a podcast or record their own voice explaining a concept. And so on. The truth is that we all mix and match techniques depending on what we are learning, how we are feeling, and even where we are. Each type is, in its own way, gloriously ridiculous and oddly effective. Identifying ourselves with the kind of learner we are can make studying feel less like a chore and more like an experience that fits our personality. Whether solving equations or composing a song, what matters most is not how you hit the books but that the method you choose truly helps you learn. Ultimately, it is different strokes for different folks: some hum, some march, some doodle, some diagram. And somehow, against all odds, they all pass the exam (with flying colours would add the kinaesthetic).