

# Learning Styles 2

## How Learners Perceive & Process the Language

In Learning Styles 1, we looked at the different learning styles of the Analytical learner compared to the Intuitive learner. In this article, we will continue on this theme but further divide these two categories into four.

David Kolb, a well-known linguist, claims that there are two ways people approach learning situations: the way in which they PERCEIVE material from the outside world (by sensing/feeling or by thinking) and the way in which they PROCESS that material (by active/doing or by reflective/watching).

Which of the following statements describes you most accurately?:

1. I like making things happen.
2. 'Being' is more important to me than 'doing'.
3. I like applied sciences, business and engineering.
4. I am interested in science, math and research.
5. I seek variety in what I do.
6. I am sensitive to other people's needs.
7. I like to see projects well managed.
8. I love the grammar section of each (textbook) lesson best of all.
9. I like to be where the action is.
10. I am more affected by feelings than by logic.
11. I like things to be useful (utilitarian)
12. Principles are more important to me than practices.
13. I thrive on fresh challenges.
14. I particularly value harmonious relationships.
15. I like to be under a teacher who is well organized and in control.
16. I am more affected by logic than by feelings.
17. I am a risk-taker.
18. I prefer to learn cooperatively with others.
19. I like to apply ideas and see them working.
20. I strive for academic excellence.
21. I seek to influence others.

22. I am an intuitive person.
23. I like to be productive.
24. I like discussion to be rational.

Kolb used the distinctions within these two dimensions – PERCEPTION and PROCESS – to divide all learners into 4 basic learning styles:

*perceive material* { *or*  
                                  { by sensing/feeling  
                                  { by thinking

*process material* { *or*  
                                  { active/doing  
                                  { reflective/watching

'Sensing/feeling' refers more to right-brain activity, while 'thinking' is more to do with left-brain activity. 'Reflective' students are cautious, needing time to think through the possible options before venturing an opinion, resulting in greater accuracy. 'Impulsive' learners, on the other hand, respond rapidly and are more willing to take risks. Fluency is more important to them than accuracy. In language learning, a balance between the two seems desirable as both accuracy and fluency are equally important.

For those familiar with the DISC profile patterns, High D approximates sensing/feeling + active/doing, High I approximates sensing/feeling + reflective/watching, High S approximates thinking + active/doing, and High C approximates thinking + reflective/watching.

With regard to the above questionnaire, if you checked off questions 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 21, you are a 'High D learner', perceiving language concretely (sensing/feeling) and processing it actively. If you checked off questions 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, 22, you are a 'High I learner', perceiving language concretely and processing it reflectively. If you checked off questions 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, you are a 'High S learner', perceiving language abstractly (thinking) and

processing it actively. If you checked off questions 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, you are a 'High C learner', perceiving language abstractly and processing it reflectively.

It is important to bear in mind that you are probably not simply a 'High S' (for instance), but a combination of personality types, one possibly being stronger than the others.

### **How do these 4 types of learners differ in the way they learn the language? What different learning styles do they have?**

**High D** learners learn by trial and error. They like change, flexibility and risk taking. They get enthusiastic about new challenges. They are often seen as impatient and pushy. They discard theories if they do not fit the facts. However, their tendency may be to act on gut feelings rather than on logical analysis, learning primarily from hands-on experience. When learning languages, they learn well when there is plenty of variety and new material (becoming quickly bored with routine tasks). Although they are not as sensitive as the 'High I learner', they like to be on good terms with the teacher. However, if their needs are not met in the classroom, they may try to change the system or opt out and get on with their own thing. Of all four types of learner, they're least concerned with evaluations.

**High I** learners seek personal involvement and are interested in people as well as exploring the culture. The teacher is their motivator. They approach problems reflectively and look for meaning. They enjoy situations that call for generating a wide range of ideas, such as brainstorming, and their favorite question is "Why?". Their approach to situations is to observe rather than take action. Their imaginative ability and sensitivity to feelings helps them relate well to people. When learning languages, they value personal relationships with teachers and other students (and everyone else!). They are very empathetic, sensitive to the feelings of others. They need positive feedback and affirmation to keep them motivated. Evaluation of their work is taken very seriously

and personally. Also, meaning is important to them as well as the need to know the relevance of what they are learning.

**High S** learners start with an idea, then try it out to see if it works – thereby integrating theory with practice. They do not tolerate fuzzy ideas. They are good at finding practical solutions to problems, as well as in decision making and practical application of ideas and theories. They value common sense and pragmatism. They would rather deal with technical tasks and problems than with social and interpersonal issues. However, this doesn't mean that they don't enjoy interacting with people. When learning languages, they like structure and clear instructions concerning what is expected of them. They usually enjoy school and feel at home in the traditional classroom, seeking to please the teacher. They try to do all the set work but are not so happy working on unsupervised projects. They like learning facts but are uneasy when required to use ingenuity and imagination. The teacher is respected by these solution-oriented learners and so teacher's comments are taken seriously. High S students respond well to criticism and evaluations.

**High C** learners develop theories from integrating their observations with what is already known. They need to know what the experts (i.e. teachers) think. They value sequential thinking and details spelt out step-by-step, and appreciate traditional classrooms. They are more concerned with abstract concepts and ideas than with people. Facts are more important than feelings, and they have a constant quest for knowledge. When learning languages, these 'science research analysts' types like the lesson presented in concise, logical form. They love analyzing the grammar! They tend to interact only with the teacher and other 'bright' students whom they see as intellectual equals. Recreation and social activities may be seen as a waste of time – resulting in slow progress in fluency. They prefer the library to attending social events. These types need to succeed, since competence is highly valued. Failure can be devastating, yet they often set unrealistically high standards for themselves.

## **What learning strategies will aid these four types?**

**High D's** enjoy getting out and using the language in meaningful social contact. In the classroom, if their teacher isn't very creative, they should ask the school to change her for someone who is more active and action-oriented, or find their own tutor who suits their personality. If they don't, they will quickly become frustrated, bored, and will lose their motivation for study.

**High I's** will enjoy using Chinese to build relationships with Chinese people. If all those grammar rules don't grab them, they should just glance over them before the lesson and concentrate on talking!

**High S's** have the self-discipline, are structured and orderly, and will work hard at their studies. They must remember to maintain the balance between study and outside practice, always bearing in mind that one of their main purposes in learning Chinese is to build friendships with Chinese people.

**High C's** are in danger of being more interested in learning about the Chinese language (the grammar, etc.) than achieving a high degree of fluency in the language. They must also beware of setting their standards too high – success in language learning takes time, so they should set realistic goals for themselves.

## **Spotting the D-I-S-C Teacher**

**High D teachers'** classrooms have a creative atmosphere with plenty of variety. They may not always stick to the curriculum. They motivate their students by their enthusiasm and are in turn motivated by helping students achieve their language learning objectives.

**High I teachers** see their students as their friend, genuinely wanting to help them progress in Chinese.

**High S teachers** seek to give their students the sort of teaching they decide the students will need in order to attain their learning

objectives. They, in turn, expect their students to work hard. They are traditional teachers, combining clear explanations with appropriate practice.

**High C teachers'** basic aim is to transmit knowledge and to share their own love of knowledge (e.g. seen in their enthusiastic explanation of a fresh insight into Chinese grammar they had recently!). Their lessons are presented in a systematic and orderly fashion. There will be lots of facts. They will enjoy teaching the bright students, but may easily get frustrated with a slow one. In the classroom they are fair but authoritarian.