



Learning Styles

Learning a new skill can be helped by understanding how best one learns. To know which approach is most suitable for oneself, the learning process itself can be made more efficient and enjoyable. Likewise when teaching a topic, it can help to know the styles used by whomever is learning. Of course, depending on the activity, one is limited to the approach that can be taken (e.g., I might want to reflect but urgent action could be required); a less dominant or a blend of styles might even be more applicable (such can help to become a bit of an “all-rounder” though).

Honey and Mumford (1989) highlight one theory of Learning Styles whereby they propose four distinct styles (Activist, Reflector, Theorist, Pragmatist) that people use when learning. Whilst people can have characteristics of all four they typically use one or two of these styles mainly. To decipher which is your predominant style, use the pointers and/or the questionnaire below.

1. Activists: learn by doing, liking to personally engage themselves in new experiences; they're open to new experiences, they'll give “anything a try” and they tend to act first think second, they'll “leap before they look”.

Activists learn best when:

- ❖ involved in new experiences, opportunities, puzzles, problems
- ❖ working with others; problem solving, games, role-plays, group discussions
- ❖ thrown in at the deep end
- ❖ leading a group, competing

Activists learn least when:

- ❖ listening to lectures
- ❖ reading long explanations
- ❖ solo work
- ❖ analysing and interpreting lots of data
- ❖ following precise instructions

3. Theorists: learn by having models, concepts, certainty, and facts, liking to understand the theory or reasons behind the actions. They'll analyse and synthesise and tend to dislike subjective judgements.

Theorists learn best when:

- ❖ activities are supported by ideas/concepts that form a model, system or theory
- ❖ in a structured situation with clarity of purpose
- ❖ they can enquire and explore
- ❖ they must understand complexities

Theorists learn least:

- ❖ when the emphasis is emotion and feeling
- ❖ in unclear situations or activities
- ❖ when acting without knowing the rules or “lay of the land”

2. Reflectors: learn by looking and thinking about what occurred, liking to consider many possible points of view and implications before concluding or deciding. They tend to be cautious and thoughtful.

Reflectors learn best when:

- ❖ they stand back and observe first
- ❖ given space to consider and examine before commenting or acting
- ❖ given a chance to review events, doing tasks without tight deadlines
- ❖ working in pairs

Reflectors learn least when:

- ❖ made to lead in a group
- ❖ made to decide without info
- ❖ doing things unprepared
- ❖ rushed by deadlines
- ❖ in inflexible situation

4. Pragmatists: are open to learning applicable info. They'll seek new, progressive ideas and they like to “just get on with it”, getting impatient with lack of clarity and slow/no movement. They are practical, unpretentious people.

Pragmatists learn best when:

- ❖ the link between topic and need is obvious and existing
- ❖ they are given techniques with practical advantages
- ❖ they can get experts' feedback
- ❖ they can copy a template or a role play.

Pragmatists learn least when:

- ❖ there is no practical benefit
- ❖ there are no clear instructions or guidelines
- ❖ it appears to be “all theory”



Honey & Mumford's (1989) Questionnaire

No time limit to the questionnaire; takes about 10-15 minutes. The accuracy of the results depends on precise and honest you can answer. There are no right or wrong answers. If you agree more than you disagree with a statement put a tick. If you disagree more than you agree put an X by it. Mark each item with either a tick or cross. When completed the questionnaire, respond to the points that follow.

- 1. I have strong beliefs about what is right and wrong, good and bad.
- 2. I often act without considering the possible consequences.
- 3. I tend to solve problems using a step-by-step approach.
- 4. I believe that formal procedures and policies restrict people.
- 5. I have a reputation for saying what I think, simply and directly.
- 6. I often find that actions based on feelings are as sound as those based on analysis.
- 7. I like the sort of work where I have time for thorough preparation and implementation.
- 8. I regularly question people about their basic assumptions.
- 9. What matters most is whether something works in practice.
- 10. I actively seek out new experiences.
- 11. When I hear about a new idea/approach I immediately start working out how to apply it in practice.
- 12. I am keen on self-discipline, e.g., watching my diet, regular exercise, sticking to a fixed routine etc.
- 13. I take pride in doing a thorough job.
- 14. I get on best with logical, analytical people and less well with spontaneous, "irrational" people.
- 15. I take care over the interpretation of data available to me and avoid jumping to conclusions.
- 16. I like to reach a decision carefully after weighing up many alternatives.
- 17. I'm attracted more to novel, unusual ideas than to practical ones.
- 18. I don't like disorganised things and prefer to fit things into a coherent pattern.
- 19. I accept and stick to laid down procedures and policies so long as I regard them as an efficient way of getting the job done.
- 20. I like to relate my actions to a general principle.
- 21. In discussions I like to get straight to the point.
- 22. I tend to have distant, rather formal relationships with people at work.
- 23. I thrive on the challenge of tackling something new and different.
- 24. I enjoy fun-loving, spontaneous people.
- 25. I pay meticulous attention to detail before coming to a conclusion.
- 26. I find it difficult to produce ideas on impulse.
- 27. I believe in coming to the point immediately.
- 28. I am careful not to jump to conclusions too quickly.
- 29. I prefer to have as many sources of information as possible -the more data to mull over the better.
- 30. Flippant people who don't take things seriously enough usually irritate me.
- 31. I listen to other people's point of view before putting my own forward.
- 32. I tend to be open about how I'm feeling.
- 33. In discussions I enjoy watching the manoeuvrings of the other participants.
- 34. I prefer to respond to events spontaneously/flexibly rather than plan things out in advance.
- 35. I tend to be attracted to techniques such as network analysis, flow charts, branching programmes, contingency planning, etc.
- 36. It worries me if I have to rush out a piece of work to meet a tight deadline.
- 37. I tend to judge people's ideas on their practical merits.
- 38. Quiet, thoughtful people tend to make me feel uneasy.
- 39. I often get irritated by people who want to rush things.



- 40. It is more important to enjoy the present moment than to think about the past or future.
- 41. I think that decisions based on a thorough analysis of all the information are sounder than those based on intuition.
- 42. I tend to be a perfectionist.
- 43. In discussions I usually produce lots of spontaneous ideas.
- 44. In meetings I put forward practical realistic ideas.
- 45. More often than not, rules are there to be broken.
- 46. I prefer to stand back from a situation and consider all the perspectives.
- 47. I can often see inconsistencies and weaknesses in other people's arguments.
- 48. On balance I talk more than I listen.
- 49. I can often see better, more practical ways to get things done.
- 50. I think written reports should be short and to the point.
- 51. I believe that rational, logical thinking should win the day.
- 52. I tend to discuss specific things with people rather than engaging in social discussion.
- 53. I like people who approach things realistically rather than theoretically.
- 54. In discussions I get impatient with irrelevancies and digressions.
- 55. If I have a report to write I tend to produce lots of drafts before settling on the final version.
- 56. I am keen to try things out to see if they work in practice.
- 57. I am keen to reach answers via a logical approach.
- 58. I enjoy being the one that talks a lot.
- 59. In discussions I often find I am the realist, keeping people to the point, avoiding wild speculations.
- 60. I like to ponder many alternatives before making up my mind.
- 61. In discussions with people I often find I am the most dispassionate and objective.
- 62. In discussions I'm more likely to adopt a "low profile" than take the lead and do most of the talking.
- 63. I like to be able to relate current actions to a longer-term bigger picture.
- 64. When things go wrong I am happy to shrug it off and "put it down to experience".
- 65. I tend to reject wild, spontaneous ideas as being impractical.
- 66. It's best to think carefully before taking action.
- 67. On balance I do the listening rather than the talking.
- 68. I tend to be tough on people who find it difficult to adopt a logical approach.
- 69. Most times I believe the end justifies the means.
- 70. I don't mind hurting people's feelings so long as the job gets done.
- 71. I find the formality of having specific objectives and plans stifling.
- 72. I'm usually one of the people who puts life into a party.
- 73. I do whatever is expedient to get the job done.
- 74. I quickly get bored with methodical, detailed work.
- 75. I am keen on exploring basic assumptions, principles and theories underpinning things and events.
- 76. I'm always interested to find out what people think.
- 77. I like meetings to be run on methodical lines, sticking to laid down agenda, etc.
- 78. I steer clear of subjective or ambiguous topics.
- 79. I enjoy the drama and excitement of a crisis situation.
- 80. People often find me insensitive to their feelings.



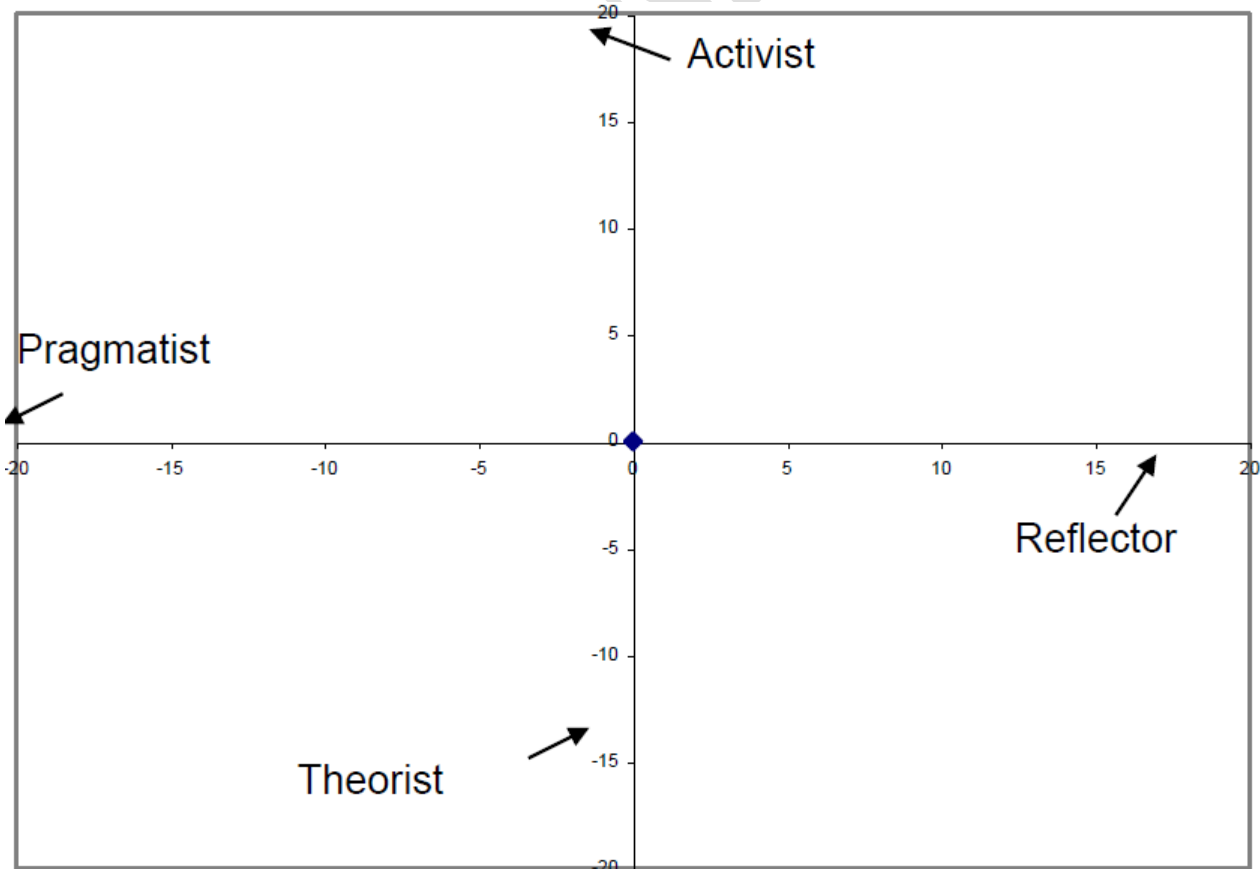
Scoring: Score 1 for each ticked item; no points for crossed items.

2	7	1	5
4	13	3	9
6	15	8	11
10	16	12	19
17	25	14	21
23	28	18	27
24	29	20	35
32	31	22	37
34	33	26	44
38	36	30	49
40	39	42	50
43	41	47	53
45	46	51	54
48	52	57	56
58	55	61	59
64	60	63	65
71	62	68	69
72	66	75	70
74	67	77	73
79	76	78	80

Totals

Activist Reflector Theorist Pragmatist

Plot the scores on the arms of the cross below; joining the dots which will present a kite-like shape indicating your predominant style.



Your result might show that you have a certain learning style. This could be helpful to know as you tackle certain tasks. Consider if the approaches you adopt are best for you. Would another style be more helpful? Review what each style says above to give a more meaningful sense of your style as measured here.