What Are Learning Styles?

As lifetime learners, every human being has developed preferences for processing new information and absorbing it. These differences are more important than we realize. For instance, it’s easy to jump to the conclusion that anyone can get to a new destination by following a map, but some people find it easier to listen to directions provided by a voice on GPS or by following written instructions in a step-by-step list. To help learners discover ways to study that work best for them, researchers have divided these different ways to learn into some common categories. This unit will help students discover their learning preferences and add new study tools to their educational toolbox.

Often students confuse learning style preferences with teaching methods. Students new to college will experience all kinds of professors during their years in higher education. Some lecturers, for instance, mix lecture format with engaging activities, video clips, and discussion questions, creating an interesting environment for all students regardless of their learning style preferences. Other professors will lecture without using any visual aids or interactive activities because that teaching method best fits their own learning preference. A verbal learner is at home in the lecture classroom, but the students who are visual or kinesthetic learners (learn through movement) often feel lost in a college lecture. What can be done about the latter classroom situation?

Although it is tempting to expect the professor to change a teaching style to help students learn course content, it is the student’s responsibility to adjust to the teaching environment. When students become of aware of their learning preferences, they take control of the learning experience by choosing study aids and methods of review that best fit their method of processing and encoding new information in memory.