

# **Exploring Students' and Staff Members' Learning Modality and Learning Style Preferences**

## **Reference to Subcomponent from Matrix:**

### **X Mission and Learning Principles**

Curriculum and Assessment Systems

Instructional Programs and Practices

Personnel: Hiring, Appraisal, and Development

Structures, Policies, and Governance

## **Purpose of This Tool:**

An essential component of developing a school that promotes high levels of student understanding is the active engagement of learners in the processes of self-regulation and self-knowledge. This tool can be used with students as well as staff members to help them to: (1) assess their preferred learning modalities, i.e., sensory channels and processes they prefer to emphasize when learning and communicating ideas and insights; (2) analyze their cognitive style preferences, i.e., their preferred approaches to taking in information and processing it; (3) identify patterns related to their preferred approaches to self-management and self-regulation; (4) explore their personality style(s) and its implications for how they approach the learning process; and (5) speculate on the intelligence(s) they exhibit most often when engaged in the learning process.

## **How to Use This Tool:**

1. Administer one or more sections of this tool at the beginning of a course or grade level. Encourage students (and/or staff) to share information about the profile they are constructing and what it reveals about themselves.
2. Investigate with students (and/or staff) the implications of their responses to various parts of this tool, especially what their responses may reveal about their learning preferences and strengths and areas in which they need to be more conscious, self-regulated, or self-aware.
3. Consider using student-generated profiles as part of your efforts to differentiate instruction, accommodating students' learning preferences and interests into the design and implementation of lessons and units.
4. Encourage staff members to discuss their reactions to their own emerging learning portrait(s) and the extent to which they reflect their own self-perceptions and preconceptions.

5. Additionally, encourage staff members to analyze emerging patterns about areas of alignment and areas of difference between themselves, other staff members, and the students with whom they work.

**Tips/Variations:**

1. Engage study groups in a formal investigation of different learning style and personality inventories and related theoretical frameworks currently in use in business and educational settings: e.g., the 4-MAT System, Gregorc, Kolb, Myers-Briggs, Dunn and Dunn, Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.
2. Encourage inquiry teams to identify potential areas of alignment between student achievement gaps and instructional strategies reflective of sensitivity to students' interests and learning style preferences. Investigate how greater attention to this issue might enhance student achievement and motivation.
3. Use action research teams to study the impact of teacher attention to students' learning modalities, intelligences, and style preferences upon student understanding and achievement of proficiency relative to significant performance standards at a particular grade level or within a specific course.

# Exploring Students' and Staff Members' Learning Modality and Learning Style Preferences

## **Directions:**

1. Each of us has a different approach to learning, including the conditions under which we learn best, the ways in which our thinking processes operate and are organized, the influences of our personality style, and the ways in which we demonstrate intelligence. Think about yourself in relationship to each of the categories presented in the questionnaire below.
2. At the conclusion of each part of this questionnaire, examine the patterns that have emerged in that section. Complete a brief summary of the patterns you observe and their implications for how you learn.
3. When you have completed the entire questionnaire, compare your portrait of yourself as a learner with others in your team, class, or other group. How are you similar? How are you different?
4. Then, with your partner(s), make a list of recommendations for how your learning modality and learning style preferences can best be addressed by your teacher(s).

## **Part I: What are your preferred learning modalities?**

*Select all of the descriptors below that apply to you when you are learning something new or attempting to understand something in greater depth. (Remember that you can select as many in each section as you like as long as they reflect regular or consistent patterns in your learning and behavior.)*

- I prefer a high degree of light in my learning environment.
- I prefer a medium degree of light in my learning environment.
- I prefer the lights to be low in my learning environment.
  
- I prefer a high degree of sound when I am learning something.
- I can tolerate a great deal of sound when I am learning, but I do not prefer it.
- I need a quiet environment when I am learning.
  
- I like to learn in a warm environment.
- I prefer a moderate temperature when I am learning.
- I like my learning environment to be cool or even cold when I am learning.

- I like to have a large number of objects and resources around me when I am learning. Some people have even said my learning setting is usually cluttered and messy.
- I like some objects and resources around me when I am learning, but I prefer a relatively organized environment.
- I learn best in a highly organized environment with minimal objects and resources.
  
- I tend to take in information visually, emphasizing what I see and observe.
- I tend to take in information auditorily, listening to sounds and information first before processing it.
- I tend to take in information tactually-kinesthetically, physically touching and interacting with the learning environment through my body.

***Based upon my reactions to the items in this section, here is how I would describe my learning modality preferences:***

## **Part II: What are your cognitive style preferences?**

***Select all of the descriptors below that apply to you when you are learning something new or attempting to understand something in greater depth. (Remember that you can select as many in each section as you like as long as they reflect regular or consistent patterns in your learning and behavior.)***

- I tend to be sequential and orderly in my approach to learning, taking one step at a time.
- I enjoy learning practical and factual material, and I can get impatient if things are too abstract or vague.
- I need to have assignments clearly explained to me, including their purpose, requirements, and grading criteria.
- I always want my teacher(s) to be well prepared and well organized.
- I am inclined to be highly organized, with a place for everything and everything in its place.
- I like policies, rules, and regulations to be followed consistently so that I am sure of what is expected of me and others in my learning environment.
- I like to refine and perfect what I am doing and make certain that it conforms to the standards or criteria for which I am responsible.
- I tend to be very literal when people say something, and I tend to take them at their word or face value.
- I am considered to be practical and logical in my approach to learning.

- ❑ I tend to be analytical and evaluative in my approach to learning, striving to understand what I am being taught and its overall significance or purpose.
  - ❑ I like to see the big picture meaning or overall significance of assignments I am given, and I dislike busywork.
  - ❑ I am especially interested in the big ideas, understandings, themes, and questions that underlie academic content and disciplines.
  - ❑ I need to have a deep respect for my teacher's intelligence and content expertise.
  - ❑ I tend to be an independent learner, and I enjoy research and analytical reading using a variety of sources and materials.
  - ❑ I can be a bit of a debater, and I enjoy injecting ideas into a conversation just to make certain they are being discussed and explored.
  - ❑ If I am not intellectually stimulating in class, I tend to get bored and withdraw.
  - ❑ I am very good at comparing and contrasting things, and I can easily see patterns and relationships when others cannot.
  - ❑ I enjoy a mentally challenging and verbally rich learning environment, but I dislike unnecessary competition. I'd rather explore ideas than win at something.
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- ❑ I tend to be emotional in my approach to learning. A great deal of how well I learn depends upon how I feel about the subject, the teacher, and the people around me.
  - ❑ My thinking tends to be somewhat random and associational. When I am reminded of something, I tend to conjure up memories and past feelings.
  - ❑ My interactions with others are more important to me than just learning something for the sake of learning it.
  - ❑ I like classrooms that use a lot of cooperative learning and interactive activities, rather than those that emphasize lectures and textbook material.
  - ❑ I like to express myself creatively, and I frequently use artistic means to convey what I am learning and how I am reacting to it.
  - ❑ I have to really like my teachers and know that they like me before I can really learn something effectively.
  - ❑ I have a strong sense of equity and fairness, and I tend to be protective of my own rights and well being as well as those of others. I can't stand bullies.
  - ❑ My imagination and fantasies are sometimes more powerful and important to me than what is in my immediate environment.
  - ❑ I like to talk and express myself, and when I am not allowed to do that, I can get frustrated and hurt.
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- ❑ I am a practical learner who really likes to see how things work.
  - ❑ I like to be given general directions so that I can figure things out for myself.
  - ❑ I have to be allowed to be hands-on and independent when learning something. Otherwise, I get frustrated and detach from the learning process.
  - ❑ My motto tends to be: "Don't tell me what to do"—and "Don't fence me in."
  - ❑ I really like project-based learning that allows me to explore real-world applications and uses of the content I am studying.

- ❑ People sometimes say that I am a bit of a visionary, always wanting to improve the world according to my vision of how things should be—rather than how they are.
- ❑ I like competition, and I benefit from learning activities that involve me in games and tournaments.
- ❑ I tend to be a leader during learning activities. If I'm forced to be a follower, I sometimes get bored or frustrated and take over anyway.
- ❑ I really thrive on field experiences and experiential learning opportunities that move me away from the traditional classroom into the real world beyond it.

***Based upon my reactions to the items in this section, here is how I would describe my cognitive style preferences and how they influence my learning process:***

### **Part III: How do you self-manage and self-regulate?**

***Select all of the descriptors below that apply to you when you are learning something new or attempting to understand something in greater depth. (Remember that you can select as many in each section as you like as long as they reflect regular or consistent patterns in your learning and behavior.)***

- ❑ I tend to be very conscious of my learning environment and very aware of what is going on around me.
- ❑ I tend to be somewhat aware of my learning environment, but I often miss or overlook important things going on around me.
- ❑ I frequently get caught up in my own thinking, reflections, and daydreaming, often missing big sections of what I am being taught and what is going on in my learning environment.
  
- ❑ I tend to be very aware of deadlines and time constraints, and I always manage to stay on top of what I am expected to do and the time limits for doing it.
- ❑ I am usually aware of time constraints, but there have been some occasions when time got away from me and I missed important deadlines and due dates.
- ❑ I usually am not very time aware or closure-driven. I hope things get done on time, but I am often more concerned what's immediately in front of me rather what's due down the line.

- ❑ I tend to listen to authority figures, and I always try to confirm to their expectations.
  - ❑ I tend to listen to most authority figures, but occasionally I do my own thing. However, if someone can give me a logical or reasonable explanation for doing something, I'll usually conform.
  - ❑ I march to my own drummer, and I don't like being told what to do or when to do it.
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- ❑ I am flexible in my thinking, and I am good at revisiting, revising, and rethinking what I am learning so that I can understand it better.
  - ❑ I am somewhat flexible in my thinking, but I sometimes need help from others—including my teacher—to clarify and correct misunderstandings and misconceptions.
  - ❑ Once I have learned something or concluded something, I rarely change my mind unless concrete experience forces me to.
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- ❑ If I understand the evaluation criteria for which I am responsible, I tend to use those criteria to monitor my own progress and evaluate ways I can improve my work products and performances.
  - ❑ I usually understand the evaluation criteria that will be used to grade me, but I tend to be satisfied with my initial products and performances without too much editing or revising.
  - ❑ I rarely if ever revisit or revise my work products and performances based on external evaluation criteria. I tend to be the primary judge of what I am doing and how successfully I am doing it.
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- ❑ I really strive to understand what I am learning rather than just memorizing it or modeling what the teacher does.
  - ❑ I would prefer to understand what I am learning, but sometimes I just learn it to get by and keep my teacher off my back.
  - ❑ I usually learn what I am told to learn, but I don't usually care if I really understand it. Grades are more important to me than understanding.

***Based upon my reactions to the items in this section, here is how I would describe my approach to self-management and self-regulation and how it influences my learning process:***

## **Part IV: What is your personality style? How does it influence your approach to learning?**

*Select all of the descriptors below that apply to you when you are learning something new or attempting to understand something in greater depth. (Remember that you can select as many in each section as you like as long as they reflect regular or consistent patterns in your learning and behavior.)*

- I really like to interact with people on a regular basis. Being with others gives me energy and helps me to learn.
- I like to interact with people sometimes, but at other times, I prefer to be alone and learn independently.
- I usually prefer to be alone or independent when I am learning. Sometimes interacting with others can drain my energy instead of motivating me.
  
- I am very conscious of sensory stimuli in my learning environment. I remember various sensory details much better than many people I know.
- I am somewhat conscious of sensory stimuli in my learning environment, but I frequently overlook or ignore what is occurring around me.
- I rarely am aware of the physical environment surround me when I learn, because I tend to stay focused on what is happening in my own mind and thinking processes.
  
- I tend to be highly intuitive, and I can understand something just by listening to my own mind and internal thought processes. I tend to emphasize the “big picture” rather than little details when drawing conclusions or interpreting things.
- I am somewhat intuitive, but I tend to analyze things and look for evidence to support my conclusions when analyzing or interpreting something.
- I am not intuitive. I tend to collect concrete evidence and details before making a conclusion or interpretation of something.
  
- I am influenced more by my mental processes and thoughts than by my feelings and emotional reactions.
- I tend to be a combination of head and heart, sometimes drawing conclusions based on analysis and rational interpretation and at other times based on gut reactions and feelings.
- I am a real feeling-oriented and emotional person, with my ideas and conclusions usually determined by the people I am interacting with and how I am feeling at the time.
  
- I tend to be extremely closure driven, time sensitive, and judgmental. I am rarely without an opinion.

- ❑ I tend to meet important deadlines, but at other times, I am somewhat flexible. Although I form opinions about important issues, I am neutral or non-judgmental on other occasions.
- ❑ I tend to respond to my immediate environment and perceptions, and I do not really concern myself with closure or deadlines. I live for the moment, and I tend to be non-judgmental or opinionated.

***Based upon my reactions to the items in this section, here is how I would describe my personality style and how it influences my learning process:***

### **Part V: How do you demonstrate your intelligence when learning?**

***Select all of the descriptors below that apply to you when you are learning something new or attempting to understand something in greater depth. (Remember that you can select as many in each section as you like as long as they reflect regular or consistent patterns in your learning and behavior.)***

- ❑ I often express myself through my language, and I am known for being an effective writer and speaker.
- ❑ I am viewed as being very logical, objective, and good at deductive reasoning, with an inclination toward reasoning mathematically and analyzing my world using data collection and analysis.
- ❑ I am known for being good at mechanical things, and I have a clear sense of my spatial environment and how things interconnect in it.
- ❑ I often use my body to express myself, and I am known for being a good athlete. I also am very conscious of how my body is reacting to things occurring in my environment.
- ❑ I am very self-aware, and I have a keen sense of my internal thought processes, emotional reactions, and levels of understanding.
- ❑ I am very adept at understanding how others around me are reacting to me and to one another as well as to circumstances in the environment we share.

- ❑ I have a real feeling for and awareness of phenomena in nature, including a real sense that I am most myself in outdoor environments and settings.
- ❑ I am especially interested in great universal ideas, themes, and issues, and I am known for being someone who searches for the big picture and bigger meaning of things and events.

*Based upon my reactions to the items in this section, here is how I would describe my preferred ways to show my intelligence and their influence on my learning process:*

**Part VI: What is your learning profile?**

*Based upon my reactions to the five sections of this questionnaire, here is how I would summarize my current learning profile:*

### Suggested References for Follow-Up

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