

The VARK Questionnaire - How Do I Learn Best?

Please complete the following VARK questionnaire. Choose the answer which best explains your preference and circle the letter(s) next to it.

Please circle more than one if a single answer does not match your perception. Leave blank any question that does not apply.

1. You are helping someone who wants to go to your airport, town centre or railway station. You would:

- a. go with her.
- b. tell her the directions.
- c. write down the directions.
- d. draw, or give her a map.

2. You are not sure whether a word should be spelled 'dependent' or 'dependant'. You would:

- a. see the words in your mind and choose by the way they look.
- b. think about how each word sounds and choose one.
- c. find it in a dictionary.
- d. write both words on paper and choose one.

3. You are planning a holiday for a group. You want some feedback from them about the plan. You would:

- a. describe some of the highlights.
- b. use a map or website to show them the places.
- c. give them a copy of the printed itinerary.
- d. phone, text or email them.

4. You are going to cook something as a special treat for your family. You would:

- a. cook something you know without the need for instructions.
- b. ask friends for suggestions.
- c. look through the cookbook for ideas from the pictures.
- d. use a cookbook where you know there is a good recipe.

5. A group of tourists want to learn about the parks or nature reserves in your area. You would:

- a. talk about, or arrange a talk for them about parks or nature reserves.
- b. show them internet pictures, photographs or picture books.
- c. take them to a park or nature reserve and walk with them.
- d. give them a book or pamphlets about the parks or nature reserves.

6. You are about to purchase a digital camera or mobile phone. Other than price, what would most influence your decision?

- a. Trying or testing it.
- b. Reading the details about its features.
- c. It is a modern design and looks good.
- d. The salesperson telling me about its features.

7. Remember a time when you learned how to do something new. Try to avoid choosing a physical skill, e.g. riding a bike. You learned best by:

- a. watching a demonstration.
- b. listening to somebody explaining it and asking questions.
- c. diagrams and charts - visual clues.
- d. written instructions – e.g. a manual or textbook.

8. You have a problem with your knee. You would prefer that the doctor:

- a. gave you a web address or something to read about it.
- b. used a plastic model of a knee to show what was wrong.
- c. described what was wrong.
- d. showed you a diagram of what was wrong.

9. You want to learn a new programme, skill or game on a computer. You would:

- a. read the written instructions that came with the programme.
- b. talk with people who know about the programme.
- c. use the controls or keyboard.
- d. follow the diagrams in the book that came with it.

10. I like websites that have:

- a. things I can click on, shift or try.
- b. interesting design and visual features.
- c. interesting written descriptions, lists and explanations.
- d. audio channels where I can hear music, radio programmes or interviews.

11. Other than price, what would most influence your decision to buy a new non-fiction book?

- a. The way it looks is appealing.
- b. Quickly reading parts of it.
- c. A friend talks about it and recommends it.
- d. It has real-life stories, experiences and examples.

12. You are using a book, DVD or website to learn how to take photos with your new digital camera. You would like to have:

- a. a chance to ask questions and talk about the camera and its features.
- b. clear written instructions with lists and bullet points about what to do.
- c. diagrams showing the camera and what each part does.
- d. many examples of good and poor photos and how to improve them.

13. Do you prefer a trainer or a presenter who uses:

- a. demonstrations, models or practical sessions.
- b. question and answer, talk, group discussion, or guest speakers.
- c. handouts, books, or readings.
- d. diagrams, charts or graphs.

14. You have finished a competition or test and would like some feedback. You would like to have feedback:

- a. using examples from what you have done.
- b. using a written description of your results.
- c. from somebody who talks it through with you.
- d. using graphs showing what you had achieved.

15. You are going to choose food at a restaurant or cafe. You would:

- a. choose something that you have had there before.
- b. listen to the waiter or ask friends to recommend choices.
- c. choose from the descriptions in the menu.
- d. look at what others are eating or look at pictures of each dish.

16. You have to make an important speech at a conference or special occasion. You would:

- a. make diagrams or get graphs to help explain things.
- b. write a few key words and practice saying your speech over and over.
- c. write out your speech and learn from reading it over several times.
- d. gather many examples and stories to make the talk real and practical.

The VARK Questionnaire Scoring Chart

Use the following scoring chart to find the VARK category that each of your answers corresponds to. Circle the letters that correspond to your answers e.g. If you answered b and c for question 3, circle V and R in the question 3 row.

Scoring Chart

Question	A	B	C	D
1	K	A	R	V
2	V	A	R	K
3	K	V	R	A
4	K	A	V	R
5	A	V	K	R
6	K	R	V	A
7	K	A	V	R
8	R	K	A	V
9	R	A	K	V
10	K	V	R	A
11	V	R	A	K
12	A	R	V	K
13	K	A	R	V
14	K	R	A	V
15	K	A	R	V
16	V	A	R	K

Calculating your scores

Count the number of each of the VARK letters you have circled to get your score for each VARK category.

	Total Score
V	
A	
R	
K	

The VARK Categories

The acronym VARK stands for Visual, Auditory/Aural, Read/Write, and Kinaesthetic sensory modes that are used for learning information. Fleming and Mills (1992) suggested four categories that seemed to reflect the experiences of learners. Although there is some overlap between categories, they are defined as follows.

Visual (V):

This preference includes the depiction of information in maps, spider diagrams, charts, graphs, flow charts, labelled diagrams, and all the symbolic arrows, circles, hierarchies and other devices, that instructors use to represent what could have been presented in words. It could have been called Graphic (G) as that better explains what it covers. It does NOT include movies, videos or PowerPoint. It does include designs, whitespace, patterns, shapes and the different formats that are used to highlight and convey information.

Aural / Auditory (A):

This perceptual mode describes a preference for information that is "heard or spoken." Learners with this modality report that they learn best from lectures, tutorials, tapes, group discussion, email, using mobile phones, speaking, web chat and talking things through. It includes talking out loud as well as talking to yourself. Often people with this preference want to sort things out by speaking, rather than sorting things out and then speaking.

Read/Write (R):

This preference is for information displayed as words. Not surprisingly, many academics have a strong preference for this modality. This preference emphasises text-based input and output - reading and writing in all its forms. People who prefer this modality are often addicted to PowerPoint, the Internet, lists, filofaxes, dictionaries, thesauri, quotations and words, words, words...

Kinaesthetic (K):

By definition, this modality refers to the "perceptual preference related to the use of experience and practice (simulated or real)." Although such an experience may invoke other modalities, the key is that people who prefer this mode are connected to reality, "either through concrete personal experiences, examples, practice or simulation" [See Fleming & Mills, 1992, pp. 140-141]. It includes demonstrations, simulations, videos and movies of "real" things, as well as case studies, practice and applications.

What about Mixtures?

Learning is multi-dimensional. There are seldom instances where one style is used, or is sufficient, so we have a four-mode VARK profile. That is why the VARK questionnaire gives you four scores. Those who prefer many modes almost equally are of two types. There are those who are context specific. They choose a single style to suit the

occasion or situation. There are others who are not satisfied until they have had input (or output) in all of their preferred styles. They take longer to gather information from each mode and, as a result, they often have a deeper and broader understanding.

Understanding the Results

The results indicate a 'rule of thumb' and should not be rigidly applied. Remember that the questionnaire is not intended to 'box' respondents into a mindset that they have been 'diagnosed'. Rather, it is designed to initiate discussion about, and reflection upon, learning preferences.

It is not expected that any one preference will be dominant or that all participants will be multi-dimensional. Approximately 50% of a group seem to be multi-dimensional, although they usually show preferences for Read/write as one mode. Correspondingly, there will be some people that have a strong or very strong preference that stands out from others. The most consistent finding from VARK questionnaire results is that **people are very diverse**. We cannot assume that others learn as we do.

Pay particular attention to zero scores on any mode and even more attention to them if the total number of responses is high. Zero scores in a profile are unusual and the person will often have an interesting story to tell.

The power of VARK is that people understand it intuitively and it fits practice. In VARK workshops participants say, "Yes! That's me."

The results indicate **preferences, not strengths**. Below are some points to note.

- Preferences are not the same as strengths
- VARK is about learning, not leisure
- Leaders, your VARK scores indicate how you learn, they may not indicate how to help others to learn.

Work and life experiences may blur the boundaries as people learn to use aural, visual, read/write and kinaesthetic modes equally well. Preferences may be masked by life and work experiences.

Those with a multi-dimensional modal set of VARK preferences need to process information in more than one mode in order to get enough understanding. People should be encouraged to try new learning strategies listed under their preferences.

Experience tells us that many people become much more successful if they develop a range of learning strategies based upon their preferences. It is clearly not helpful to use strategies that lie outside your preferences (e.g. using mind-maps may not help if you do not have some visual preference and mnemonics may not help if you have a low VARK score for read/write.)

A westernised education system places heavy emphasis upon the Read/Write mode. In both instruction and assessment of learning this mode is the dominant one. Most teachers, coaches and trainers express a Read/Write preference, which may disadvantage learners with other preferences. Leaders, and others who assist with learning, should use a variety of modes if they expect to reach every learner.

"Teach me my most difficult concepts in my preferred style.
Let me explore my easiest concepts in a different style.
Just don't teach me all the time in your preferred style
and think I'm not capable of learning."¹

¹ Virleen M. Carlson , Center for Learning and Teaching, Cornell University, USA.