



Quick Questionnaire Reveals Students' Preferred Learning Methods

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Is there a way to discover how each of your students learns best? Yes, there is. To accomplish this, I created my learning questionnaire preferences.

This questionnaire is based on the discussion of learning styles in *Teaching Techniques for Part Time Community College Instructors* published by the Illinois State Board of Education.

You may have categorized learning styles differently. If so, adapt the questions as needed.

I hand out the questionnaire after a brief introduction, then, I collect, photocopy and return the originals the following class session. I include a handout describing and discussing learning styles. Finally, I share a class profile (summary).



Analysis strategy

First, let me explain the thinking behind the questions. The first two questions are anecdotal, and ask how the student best learns and how his or her best teacher taught. These are revealing questions since many students have never thought about how they learn. But all have a favorite teacher whom they remember and whose teaching style they recall.

Learning preferences

One goal of this questionnaire is to discover my students' preferences for:

- Analytical
- Experiential
- Imaginative
- Practical, hands-on learning.

Another goal is to understand their preference for common tests and evaluation activities. Together, these parts reveal and verify the unique style of each student.

Primary key

The following question focuses on the keys to learning recall. Everyone has a physical intelligence that is a **primary key** for storing and recalling experiences. For example, small children need to perform a dance to recall their experience because their primary key is usually in action. They remember through their muscles and in what position or series of positions they were when they learned something.

As we grow older, people develop other primary keys: sight, sound, touch, taste, smell. Using these keys can make any subject easier to recall. Knowing your students' keys can help you present material in a way that promotes retention.

Special needs

Finally, I want to understand my students' special needs. If your institution has a facility that works with special-needs students, this question may be especially valuable. Many students do not ask for help because they don't know institutional assistance exists, or they may not wish to single themselves out.

One example is hearing-impaired students who fear their difficulty will become public record and impact future selection for education or employment. Most often, accommodating special needs does not require great effort, but doing so greatly enhances my students' success.

Time requirements

Only 15-to-20 minutes of the first class is required to administer the questionnaire. It takes only an hour or two to review the answers and prepare a class profile chart. Discussing the profile in the next session takes five to ten minutes. Finally, reviewing the material for a specific student aids the effort of handling those with problems of any kind and only takes a few minutes more.

Summary

You can also create a summary chart of the learning style characteristics of your entire class from this questionnaire; it takes about an hour or two, depending on the size of the class.

Benefits first

While the questionnaire deals with personal information that some hesitate to divulge, discuss the benefits of students focusing on this information before beginning course work. It helps to emphasize that their answers will be kept in confidence and that you are open to discussion about any of it with students individually.

Application

Learners can use the information to structure their study and class work and to increase recall and understanding. With better recall, they will not only do better on tests but spend less effort and time on preparation.

The results of my questionnaire give students tools to further their own learning. I find students become more active participants in class, both in discussing the material being presented and in suggesting ways to teach it more effectively. Most importantly, they accept more responsibility for their own learning.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Course: _____

My Learning Style

Complete the following statement:

I learn best by: _____

From your answer above, rank the statements below, on this scale:

(A) Most like me, (B) Somewhat like me, (C) Not much like me, (D) Not me.

_____ I can think about what is being discussed and relate it my own experience, if it's about real things.

_____ If I am given all the information in the right order, I can relate it to what I already know.

_____ Give me the gist of the theory so I can try it out to see what works.

_____ Let me try several different ways so I can understand why they work.

Rate the following items on this scale:

(A) Very easy, (B) Somewhat easy, (C) Somewhat difficult, (D) Very difficult.

_____ Written exams.

_____ Oral exams.

_____ Speaking in front of a large group.

_____ Discussing with a small group.

_____ Writing a multi-page report.

_____ Doing calculations.

_____ Online research.

Describe how your best-ever teacher taught.

Circle the item that most often applies to you, to complete the statement:

"When I try to recall something, the first thing that comes to mind is something I: SAW - HEARD - SMELLED - TASTED - FELT - DID."

Do you have a special learning problem or special learning ability you want me to know about? If yes, what is it?
