

The Learning Style Inventory

An important aspect of communication is an understanding between the Student and the Field Instructor about learning styles. Most teachers adopt a style of teaching which matches their own learning style, but which may be different than that of the Student's. Many misunderstandings can be avoided if both the Student and Field Instructor take the time to complete the Learning Style Inventory. Not only can misunderstandings be avoided, but also through awareness of your own learning style an expansion of both learning and teaching styles may take place. This is important since one of the roles of the social worker is to educate, and our clients and colleagues will have a variety of learning styles that we need to understand.

The Learning Style Inventory is derived from an experiential theory and model of learning developed by Kolb (1984)* and based on the seminal contributions of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin & Jean Piaget. It is a practical self-assessment instrument that can help us assess our unique learning styles, and has the advantage of only taking 30-45 minutes to complete. It tells us our preferred approach to learning in everyday life.

The Model

In this experiential model, learning is viewed as a continually recurring problem solving process in the four-stage cycle depicted below. *Concrete Experiences* are followed by *Reflective Observations* that lead to the formulation of *Abstract Concepts and Generalizations* that lead to *Active Experimentation* to test the hypotheses that have been developed. This is an ongoing process, and may be entered anywhere in the cycle.

Concrete Experience

Active Experimentation

Reflective Observation

Abstract Conceptualization

Our learning styles become second nature, and we are often unaware of how we approach problem solving. Our learning becomes a tacit way of knowing, largely influenced by our past experiences. The Learning Style Inventory is one tool the Student and the Field Instructor can use to make your learning styles explicit. As noted earlier, we often teach based on our preferred styles of learning.

* Kolb, D. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

The Learning Style Inventory

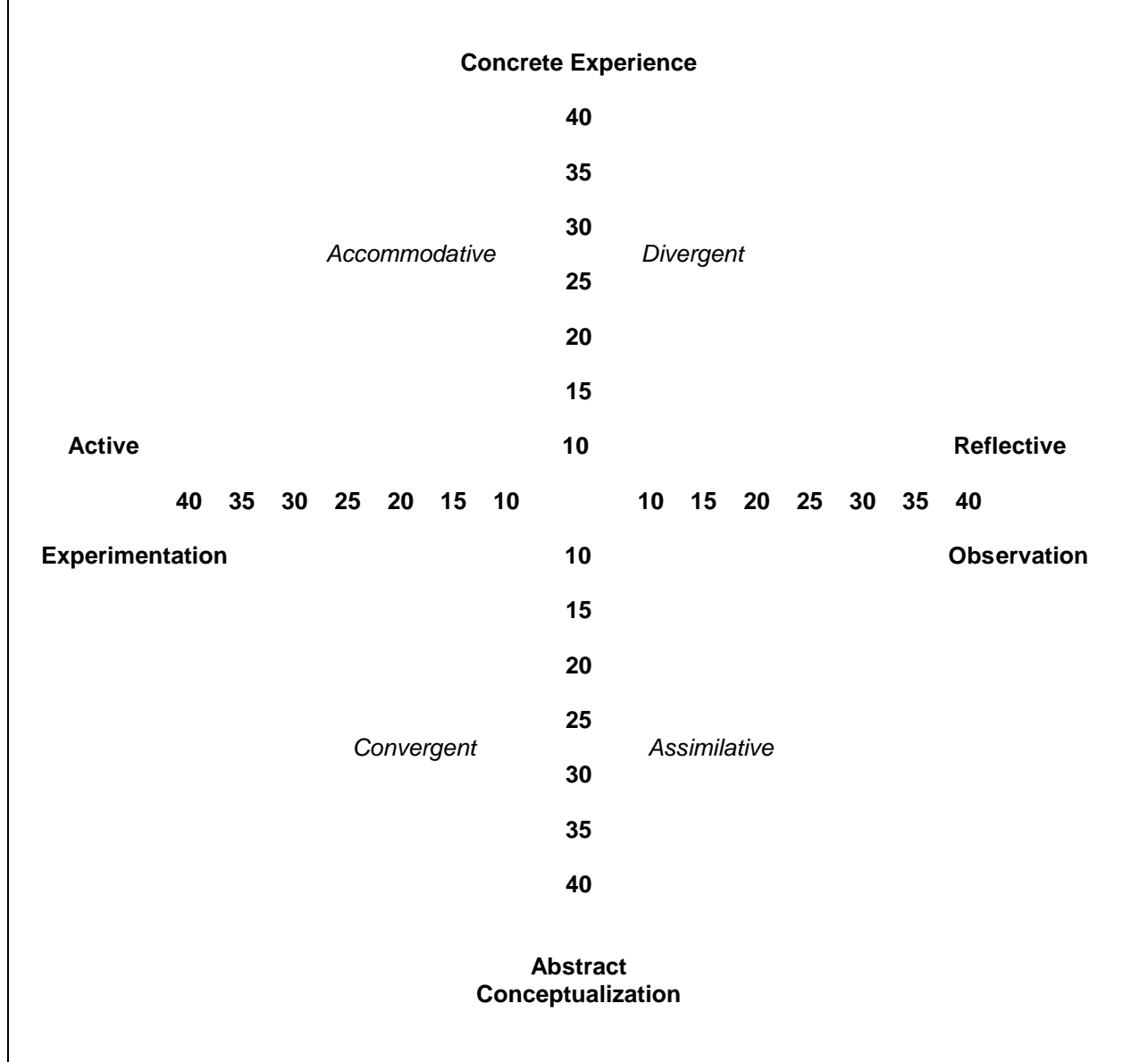
Instructions: It will take 30-45 minutes to complete the Learning Style Inventory and develop your Learning Style Profiles. As you complete the Learning Style Inventory remember that there are no right or wrong answers. The Inventory gives you an idea of *how* you learn; it does not evaluate your learning ability.

- Rank order each set of four words (going across) in the 10 items listed below. Assign a 4 to the word which *best* characterizes your learning style, a 3 to the next best, a 2 to the next, and a 1 to the *least* characteristic word. Assign a different number to each of the four words. *Do not make ties.*

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. _____ involved | _____ tentative | _____ discriminating | _____ practical |
| 2. _____ receptive | _____ impartial | _____ analytical | _____ relevant |
| 3. _____ feeling | _____ watching | _____ thinking | _____ doing |
| 4. _____ accepting | _____ aware | _____ evaluating | _____ risk-taker |
| 5. _____ intuitive | _____ questioning | _____ logical | _____ productive |
| 6. _____ concrete | _____ observing | _____ abstract | _____ active |
| 7. _____ present-oriented | _____ reflecting | _____ future-oriented | _____ practical |
| 8. _____ open to new experiences | _____ perceptive | _____ intelligent | _____ competent |
| 9. _____ experience | _____ observation | _____ conceptualization | _____ experimentation |
| 10. _____ intense | _____ reserve | _____ rational | _____ responsible |
| (for scoring only) _____ (CE) | _____ (RO) | _____ (AC) | _____ (AE) |

- Total the rank numbers you have given to the ten words in each of the four columns (add all of your scores going down). The sum of the first column gives you your score on **CE: Concrete Experience**; the second column gives you your score on **RO: Reflective Observation**; your score on the third column is for **AC: Abstract Conceptualization**; and the fourth column is your score on **AE: Active Experimentation**.
- Transfer each of your scores to the Learning Style Profile on the next page by placing a mark by the number you scores on each of the four dimensions. Connect these four marks with straight lines.

LEARNING STYLE PROFILE



Interpretation:

Your *individual scores* provide you with a measure of the relative emphasis you give to each of the four different learning modes. Kolb (1984) defines each mode as follows:

Concrete Experience (CE) -- A CE orientation focuses on being involved in experiences and dealing with immediate human situations in a personal way. It emphasizes feeling more than thinking; a concern with the uniqueness and complexity of present reality over theories and generalizations; and intuitive, "artistic" approach over a systematic, scientific approach to problems.

Reflective Observation (RO) -- An RO orientation focuses on understanding the meaning of ideas and situations by carefully observing and describing them. It emphasizes reflection and understanding over action and practical application; a concern with what is true or how things happen over what will work.

Abstract Conceptualization (AC) -- An AC orientation focuses on using logic, ideas, and concepts. It emphasizes thinking rather than feeling; a concern with building general theories rather than intuitively understanding unique, specific areas; a scientific more than an artistic approach to problems.

Active Experimentation (AE) -- An AE orientation focuses on actively influencing people and changing situations. It emphasizes practical applications as distinct from reflective understanding; a pragmatic concern with what works rather than with what is absolute truth; an emphasis on doing, more than observing.

Your ***dominant learning style***, how you resolve the tensions between conceptualizations and experience, and between action and reflection, is determined by locating the quadrant with the largest enclosed space on your Learning Style Profile. The quadrant is labeled on the Learning Style Inventory in italics.

Kolb (1984) describes the characteristics of each style based on both research and clinical observation.

Convergent -- The convergent learning style relies primarily on the dominant learning abilities of abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. The greatest strength of this approach lies in problem solving, decision-making, and the practical application of ideas. The style works best in situations where there is a single correct answer or solution to a question or problem. The style suggests a preference for task accomplishment or productivity rather than for more socio-emotional experiences.

Divergent -- The divergent learning style has the opposite learning strengths from the convergent. It emphasizes concrete experience and reflective observation. Its greatest strength lies in imaginative ability and awareness of meaning and values. The primary adaptive ability of divergence is to view concrete situations from many perspectives and to organize many relationships into a meaningful "gestalt." The emphasis in this orientation is on adaptation by observation rather than action. It is called divergent because it works best in situations that call for generation of alternative ideas and implications, such as a "brainstorming" idea session. The style suggests a preference for socio-emotional experiences over task accomplishment.

Assimilative -- In assimilation, the dominant learning abilities are abstract conceptualization and reflective observation. The greatest strength of this orientation lies in inductive reasoning and the ability to create theoretical models, in assimilating disparate observations into an integrated explanation. As in convergence, this orientation is focused less on socio-emotional interactions and more on ideas and abstract concepts. Ideas are valued more for being logically sound and precise than for their practical values. It is more important that the theory be logically sound and precise.

Accommodative -- The accommodative learning style has the opposite strengths from assimilation, emphasizing concrete experience and active experimentation. The greatest strength of this orientation lies in doing things, in carrying out plans and tasks and getting involved in new experiences. The adaptive emphasis of this orientation is on opportunity seeking, risk taking and action. This style is called accommodative because it is best suited for those situations where one must adapt oneself to changing immediate circumstances. In situations where the theory or plans do not fit the facts, those with an accommodative style will most likely discard the plan or theory.

Although each of us *may* have a dominant learning style it is important to remember that a learning style describes how we learn, not how well we learn. No particular style is intrinsically better or worse than another -- only different. Understanding the commonalities and differences between your learning style and those you are working with may be useful in communicating more effectively. It can also give you an idea of your strengths and where you can grow.