

## Index of Learning Styles and AD/HD

Richard Felder, one of the creators of the Index of Learning Styles, wrote: “The Index of Learning Styles has two principal applications in our view. The first is to provide guidance to instructors on the diversity of learning styles within their classes and to help them design instruction that addresses the learning needs of all their students.... The second is to give individual students insights to their possible learning strength and weaknesses”. The ILS can help, but unfortunately with students that have Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD or ADD) learning strengths and weaknesses vary from day to day, class to class and topic to topic. I believe a reason I fall middle of the road in the ILS is due to Attention Deficit Disorder. I observed I had no specific base regarding learning styles when taking the Index of Learning Styles ‘test’. I believe that this is one of the reasons I fall middle of the road in the ILS. The course subject, the subject presentation, and my surroundings all contribute to the amount of information I absorb. I scored middle of the road when I took the test while medicated. Yet, I took the test when I was ‘powering down’ from my medication and I found that I scored extremely higher in the visual learner rather than verbal. I believe I will learn best if the professor covers all learning styles. When reading *Learning Style Descriptions*, by Richard Felder and Barbara Soloman, they describe visual and verbal learners as: “Visual learners remember best what they see—pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films and demonstrations. Verbal learners get more out of words—written and spoken explanations”. The

most important factors for me are that a professor covers my visual and verbal styles.

A hurdle I have to overcome is ADD. Key factors are stimuli, time of day and situations with my learning styles. According to Drs. Michele Novotni and Thomas A. Whiteman, “Those with AD/HD also have difficulty listening and taking notes at the same time, as in a lecture or seminar situation. Many people take this ability for granted, but it requires regular shifting of attention from the lecture to the paper and back again” (221). It would be best for me, if my professor is giving a lecture, he or she would also offer a handout providing a review; I can give my undivided attention to the professor rather than worry about taking notes and both of my learning styles would be covered.

One of the things a professor should know is, with a person with AD/HD, too much information can be worse than not enough. Drs. Novotni and Whiteman also had this to say: “Most people learn to throw out the junk right away. ...they sift out the unimportant data they receive so it doesn't clutter their brains. But people with AD/HD have trouble throwing things away, whether its junk mail, or 'junk data'. As a result, you often feel overloaded. There is too much to deal with, so you shut down” (225). I have learned in my past mathematics classes, when I am given charts, graphs and word problems along with the explanation of the new material, I have trouble sifting through what is needed-- or not needed. I feel overwhelmed when this happens and I turn off. Word problems are especially hard for me, since I cannot seem to find the equation within the words--pulling the equation out from all the 'junk' is nearly impossible.

I am also Native American, which compounds the ADD. Native Americans tend to have many tendencies coinciding with ADD. The writers of *Information Literacy Instruction*, Esther Grassin and Joan Kaplowitz, noted this about Native Americans: “Members of this group prefer

cool temperatures and formally arranged classroom. They exhibit low persistence or a tendency to need frequent breaks while completing a task. There is a marked preference for peer and team learning. Native Americans tend to be field dependent and reflective” (76). I found it interesting that some preferences shown by my heritage are also an implication for students with AD/HD. A student with this disorder needs a formally arranged classroom, or organization within the classroom, they will need short breaks or small free moments to absorb the information while moving around, and they need time to reflect upon the material they have been presented.

Today I had an epiphany. Last week my English professor had given us an assignment, and honestly, I was totally lost. This morning, my English professor placed an outline of the assignment on the overview projector, explaining how the assignment should look; pointing where in the outline certain items should be placed. Suddenly two things came to mind; the first was --I *understood* what he was explaining with perfect clarity. The second-- the professor had my *full attention*. The epiphany? I understood because of two key elements. One was that he has shown me an outline of exactly what he wanted and how he wanted it to look, the other was that the professor had my full attention because I had taken medication 30 minutes prior to class. I was keeping focused on the lecture the professor was giving, rather than being distracted by noises, movements, and my own thoughts of how I was going to work on this assignment.

On the other hand, my current mathematics professor is clear and concise while explaining equations. I understand the process and have no problems working out solutions. Subsequently, he messed it all up by introducing a graph and showing us a short cut. I was lost...again. I struggled finding a solution because looking at the graph and learning a short cut provided *too much* information. I had to go back to the textbook, and relearn the earlier method he had taught us, trying to forget the graph and short cut. Two days later, the mathematics

professor took that same graph he had shown us. He explained it slowly, walking through the graph, clearly. He pointed out how the graph reflected the equation. He *only used the graph*. Looking only at the graph, and not grouping it with the equation, his explanation clicked into place. I was not overloaded or confused; I was not trying to process the graph and the equation at the same time. In essence, the main problem was that the mathematics professor tried to show us too much at the same time. He did not provide us time to absorb the initial process for the equation before moving straight onto the graph and the short cut.

I have chosen the same English professor I had last semester. I like the way he teaches: he is clear and to the point when explaining his assignments. He passes out handouts with instructions. He is patient. Even better, he is easy to speak with about assignments. He breaks long assignments into short drafts, giving us (me) more time to work on each assignment. Dr. Jennifer Bramer explains: “Finding the right instructor with whom to take a class may mean the difference between success and failure for many students, especially those with learning disabilities” (102).

Dr. Jennifer Bramer gives a breakdown of things that a college professor should do to help a student with AD/HD:

- Provide clear, concise, written course expectations
- Begin lectures with review and outline
- Provide stimuli by being dynamic, animated
- Vary instructional methods
- Incorporate basic skills (e.g., reading, writing)
- Provide visual and hands-on experiences
- Use overhead, chalkboard, or handout for new vocabulary

- Call only on students whose hands are raised
- Give clear, concise instructions
- Provide assignments orally and in writing
- Break long assignments into smaller parts
- Provide feedback frequently
- Permit tape recorders during lectures
- Encourage breaks or standing
- Remind students to check work

(155)

One of the things not listed, but I believe is important, is that a professor should be approachable. Richard Felder and Rebecca Brent, when writing *Understanding Student Differences*, made this comment: “While many of those who drop out do so because of academic difficulties, many others are good students who leave because of dissatisfaction with their instruction....”. I believe this stands true a great deal with students who have AD/HD. This disorder makes learning difficult since it affects the amount of information a person grasps; it has a drastic impact on the ability to learn. If their learning needs are not met, chances are that the student will become unhappy and discouraged, resulting in the student dropping the class. The student who has AD/HD should be sure to let his or her professor know that they have this disability and in turn, the professor should be prepared to have patience and a sense of humor when exchanging information with a student who has AD/HD. Dr’s Novotni and Whiteman state it perfectly when they wrote: “But AD/HD is not an inability to concentrate, but an *inconsistency* to concentrate” (95-96).

## Works Cited

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