

# Catering for different types of learner

If students enjoy their English lessons, this can provide powerful motivation. Ensuring that lessons are well paced and contain different kinds of activity will keep students interested. It is also important that you cater for different kinds of learner. Learners have different learning styles and preferences; if you cater only for one type of learner, then the others will fall behind. The important point here is variety in terms of your approach to learning activities.

## 1 What different kinds of learners are there?

There is no simple answer to this but research has shown that people do learn in different ways. Different types of learner have been identified according to which sense they seem to favour for learning and remembering.

### Visual learners

VISUAL LEARNERS like to have visual cues. For example, they prefer reading instructions to listening to them because they understand and remember them better, and they prefer looking at their coursebook to listening to explanations.

### Auditory learners

AUDITORY LEARNERS learn and remember better when they listen. Thus they prefer the teacher to give oral instructions and they remember things they have listened to more easily than things they have read.

### Kinesthetic learners

KINESTHETIC LEARNERS prefer to learn by doing or by experience. They prefer demonstration to written or verbal explanations. They will learn better by being actively involved in a task, by acting, drawing or making something.

Other classifications of learning styles focus on how students like to learn.

### Individual learners

These learners prefer to study alone because it helps them remember and they feel they work more efficiently.

### Group learners

These learners remember more and work more efficiently when they work with other people.

### Concrete learners

CONCRETE LEARNERS like visual and verbal experiences and they dislike routine learning and written work. They like to be entertained and physically involved; they want immediate, varied and lively learning experiences.

### Analytical learners

ANALYTICAL LEARNERS are independent learners who like problem solving and working things out for themselves. They like new learning material to be presented systematically and logically and they like to follow up on their own. They are serious and hardworking, and are badly affected by failure.

### Communicative learners

COMMUNICATIVE LEARNERS like a social approach to learning. They learn well from discussion and group activities, and need personal feedback and interaction. They get on best in a democratically run class.

### Authority-oriented learners

AUTHORITY-ORIENTED LEARNERS relate well to a traditional classroom, preferring the teacher as an authority figure. They like clear instructions and they need structure and logical progression in what they learn.



Think about your students. Do any of them fit into the categories of learner types listed above? Do you cater enough for them in your classes?

## 2 How can you find out about students' preferred learning styles?

We do not need to worry about precise classification of our learners but we do need to find out something about their learning style and preferences for:

- ... particular kinds of classroom activities
- ... teacher behaviour
- ... grouping arrangements
- ... sensory modes.

This kind of information may help us to predict what will and will not work in our classes. In doing the task above you may have found you have a few ideas about some of your students but not all of them. Here are some ideas for finding out about your students' preferred learning styles more systematically:

### Questionnaires

You can use a questionnaire to find out about students' attitudes to different ways of learning. You can do this at the beginning of the year or after you have been teaching a group for a while and they have experienced different approaches. PHOTOCOPIABLE PAGE 4 gives a pictorial questionnaire which you can use at a very low level. You can, of course, do the same with statements in L1, e.g.

*How do you like to learn? Tick the statements that are true for you:*

- 1 I prefer working alone to working in a group.
- 2 I remember things better when I see them written down.
- 3 I like the teacher to correct all my mistakes.

When you have done the questionnaires you will need to analyse them. Are there any general tendencies in the class? Or is there great variety among individuals? General tendencies may mean that you should favour some teaching approaches over others whereas a lot of variation in the student responses may suggest that a more varied approach is better. If you return the questionnaires to the students, keep a note of their responses for future reference.

### Student feedback

You can ask students what they thought of particular activities after they have done them. This can form part of their work record: in the last five minutes of the lesson the students complete a form saying what they learned or practised, how they did it, what they liked and what they did not like. There is an example of a work record sheet on PHOTOCOPIABLE PAGE 5.

Formal and informal testing

You will be able to assess the effectiveness of the learning activities you use by evaluating student progress, both through informal checking and formal tests. Different students may remember different things if they have very different learning preferences but if there are some lessons that no one seems to remember well, this may indicate a general tendency in the class.

**3 How can you cater for different learning styles?**

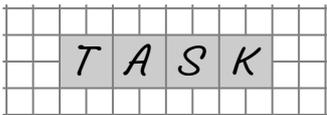
It is almost certainly the case that some learners have traditionally been at an advantage in the classroom. VISUAL LEARNERS, individual learners and AUTHORITY-ORIENTED LEARNERS have been favoured, particularly in secondary school, since much teaching has depended on the written word, individual work and the teacher in a traditional authoritarian role.

The teacher's own learning style and preferences may influence his/her teaching style. So if you are the type of learner described above (and it seems that many teachers are!), then your teaching style is likely to reflect this.

Obviously, other types of learner will then be at a disadvantage because they do not learn well in this way. Thus they may fall behind. It is important, therefore, to make a conscious effort to vary the teaching approaches you use, so that you cater for as many types of learner as possible.

We will look now at some different ways of approaching various learning activities to ensure that we cater for different types of learner.

**Grammar presentation**



Cover the ideas below. You want to present the present simple with *he/she* for talking about daily routines. How many different ways can you think of doing this? Which learning styles does each one seem suitable for?  
Now read the following ideas and compare them with your own.

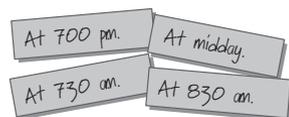


- Use pictures of a character, e.g. Dracula, a famous footballer or pop star, etc. (depending on the students' ages and interests) doing a variety of actions with a time next to each one. Hold the pictures up and try to elicit the language from the students. If they don't know how to say it, you tell them. Model it clearly, using your fingers to help if necessary to indicate each word, and get the students to repeat. Go through the pictures one by one, modelling and drilling. Recap on them orally before you write them up on the board at the end.

This approach is likely to appeal to students who like to learn by listening and repeating, that is AUDITORY LEARNERS. It may also appeal to CONCRETE LEARNERS who enjoy visual and verbal experiences.



- Give each pair or group of students a set of sentences describing someone's day, written on separate strips of card. Give them another set of cards with times on (e.g. *at 7.00*) They match them up and put them in order as best they can. You then play a tape or read out the correct version. Students listen and correct their sentences as necessary. Then they copy them into their notebooks.



This approach is more suitable for VISUAL and KINESTHETIC LEARNERS since the written word is used and the students are involved in a task. Students who like working in groups also benefit as may ANALYTICAL and COMMUNICATIVE LEARNERS.



- Put a picture of a person on the board and draw a clock, giving a certain time. Mime the activity, e.g. *Dracula wakes up at midnight*. As you mime, say the sentence and repeat it several times. At this stage the students only listen. After listening to all the sentences, tell the students to mime as you go through them again. First, you mime with them, then let them mime on their own. You can then say the sentences in a different order and get the students to do the right mime. You then mime and get the students to say the sentences together. After this, ask individuals to say the sentences while the other students mime. Finally, show the students the sentences written on large cards; they read and mime.

This approach will appeal to KINESTHETIC LEARNERS who learn by doing, AUDITORY LEARNERS as the language is first spoken, and CONCRETE LEARNERS who enjoy physical involvement and lively learning experiences.



- Write some example sentences on the board and ask the students to translate them. Name the tense, explain its use and underline the -s at the end of the verb. The students copy the example sentences and the grammar explanation into their notebooks.

This approach is likely to suit VISUAL LEARNERS, who like to see things written down, individual learners, and AUTHORITY-ORIENTED LEARNERS since the teacher is taking a more traditional role as instructor.

The four examples above are all valid ways of presenting this piece of new language and you probably came up with more good ideas of your own. As we have seen, different approaches will suit different types of learner.

Taking into consideration all of the different classifications of types of learner, the following factors seem to be the important things that we can vary in our approaches to teaching grammar:

- ... the type of prompts and aids used (written, visual, oral, acted out)
- ... interaction: individual, whole-class or groupwork or pairwork
- ... students can be told the rules, given a model or asked to work things out for themselves
- ... examples and practice before rules or vice versa
- ... student roles, degree and type of participation
- ... type of student response, i.e. oral, written, acting out.

By varying the approach you use for presentations and using different approaches when recycling grammar, you will be catering for different learner types in a mixed-ability class.

### Vocabulary

There are a lot of different ways of presenting and practising vocabulary, too. By varying the type of learning activity, you can cater for different learning styles and help make the vocabulary more memorable.



Think of as many ways as you can of presenting the following vocabulary items. Use the list on page 26 to help you.

- 1 parts of the body
- 2 a set of action verbs: *run, ride a horse, swim, ride a bike, climb a tree, play football*

Here are some ideas to start with:

- a) noises on tape
- b) pictures to elicit the words orally
- c) matching words to situations, definitions or pictures
- d) picture dictionaries
- e) translation
- f) mime or gesture
- g) a text with gaps and a list of the words

1 parts of the body

- Point to different parts of your body and say the word, e.g. *foot*. Repeat this, getting students to point to their feet. Do it a third time while the students say the words in chorus. Then give a student one of the other 'body parts' words on card; he/she says it out loud and the other students point.
- Give students a picture of a body and a jumbled list of the words for parts of the body. In pairs they match them.
- In groups, students draw a picture of a body on a poster. Then give them the words for parts of the body on cards; they stick them in the right place.
- Give students a list of the English words for parts of the body and a list of the words in L1. They use a dictionary and work individually to match them.

2 a set of action verbs

- Give the students sentences with gaps and pictures next to them; they have to choose the correct verb to complete the sentence.
- Mime and elicit the verbs, then students mime them.
- Show the students pictures of the actions and try to elicit the verbs orally .



Go through the activities presented in the section on Vocabulary above and work out which type(s) of learner each activity would suit.

**Skills work**

It is also important to provide practice in all the four skills so that different types of learner are catered for. For example, if you do a lot of silent reading and writing in class and little listening and oral work you are favouring VISUAL LEARNERS OVER AUDITORY LEARNERS. Thus you need to ensure that you include a good balance of the skills.



Can you think of some ideas for varying work on the productive skills (speaking and writing) and the receptive skills (reading and listening) so that you cater for different types of learner? Think about how you could vary interaction, the types of prompts you use and the actual tasks.

Compare your ideas with those in the menu below and on page 27.

<p><b>Interaction</b></p> <p>individual pairwork groupwork whole class</p>	}	sitting, standing, mingling
--	---	-----------------------------

**Prompts**

written prompts (sentences, words)  
 pictures (drawings, photographs, magazine pictures)  
 videos  
 reading texts (letters, postcards, stories, adverts, magazine articles, headlines, newspaper articles, cartoons, instructions, lists, poems, dialogues, plays, recipes, jokes)  
 listening texts (songs, conversations, adverts, radio programmes, telephone conversations, poems, stories, plays, jokes)  
 noises on tape  
 music  
 real objects  
 CUISENAIRE RODS

**Tasks**

before language focus, students experiment with language  
 after language focus, students practise what they have learned

**Speaking**

discussion  
 ROLEPLAY  
 storytelling  
 giving instructions to make or do something  
 talking about oneself  
 describe and draw  
 describe and arrange  
 find the differences  
 plays and sketches  
 problem solving  
 presentations

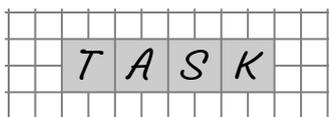
**Writing**

lists (shopping lists, holiday lists)  
 messages  
 stories  
 poems  
 for and against compositions  
 captions for pictures or strip cartoons  
 postcards and letters  
 instructions for doing or making something  
 sketches and dialogues

**Listening and reading**

answering written questions (*wh*- questions, true/false, multiple choice)  
 answering oral questions  
 ordering pictures  
 selecting picture(s)  
 drawing  
 making something  
 ordering text  
 moving/miming  
 acting out  
 reading aloud or singing  
 reading and listening at the same time  
 gap-filling  
 choosing titles  
 labelling a picture or diagram

By varying the types of tasks and activities we use as well as the stage of the lesson at which we use them and the interaction patterns, we should be able to cater for different learning styles and preferences and thus maximise opportunities for all our students to learn.



Think back to some skills lessons you have done recently and look at the suggestions for varying your approaches above. How many different options have you used? Have you tended to cater for particular learning styles and preferences? Where could you introduce more variety in future?