

Knowing Yourself as a Learner

Just as there are differences in personality, there are differences in the ways that we learn and use information. Some people are quiet and tend to be reflective in the way they process information. Others are "take charge" kinds of people who need to put information to immediate use and to solve problems.

Just as we have different preferences and ways of learning, we also change and adjust our learning strategies based on our own development and on the different learning situations in which we find ourselves. By understanding ourselves and becoming more aware of these differences, we become more capable of adjusting to new situations throughout our lifetime as learners.

Metacognition or "self-knowing" includes the following aspects of understanding our "learning" selves:

- Knowing our learning "style" and how we learn best in different learning situations.
- Our recognition of differences in learning tasks and our ability to match the appropriate learning strategy to the task.
- Our ability to monitor whether we are understanding and learning in a given situation or during the performance of a task.
- When we know that we do not understand, recognizing the problem and identifying a different strategy that will be more appropriate to the learning situation.

1. **Knowing our learning "style" and how we learn best in different learning situations.**

By gaining an awareness of your learning style, you can choose the learning strategies that work best for you. For example,

- If you are a visual/right-brained or holistic learner, you might use mapping, drawings, and color-coding as note-taking strategies to make information visual and to capture the main ideas or "big picture".
- If you are an auditory learner, you can tape record lectures and ask questions during the lecture to get more information in an auditory format.
- If you are "left-brained" and a detail/step-by-step learner, you will want to use an outline or Cornell note-taking system that puts the information in a linear format.

You should also consider environmental factors like time of day, temperature, level of sound and size of groupings in which you learn best. Then try to schedule your classes and study sessions around your preferences.

2. **Our recognition of differences in learning tasks and our ability to match the appropriate learning strategy to the task.**

For example, there are different types of reading tasks and different strategies that are appropriate when reading these materials.

- When you read literature, you identify the theme and how the author expands on that theme through the use of story, characters, setting, action, etc.
- When you read a science textbook, you read for important details: critical concepts, definitions of important terms, examples or applications, etc.
- When read math word problems, you identify the problem and then determine which processes and calculations will give you the solution to the problem.

- When you come to a new kind of task or problem, you go through the following steps:
 1. Identify what kind of task it is by scanning your memory for a similar task.
 2. Once you have found a match to the new task or problem, determine the strategies you used to complete the original task.
 3. Apply the same strategies to the new task.

3. **How we monitor whether we are understanding and learning in a given situation or task.** As we apply learning strategies to tasks, we should continuously check the **effectiveness of the process** by evaluating our progress in completing the task; and the **outcome or understanding** by asking ourselves the following questions:

- What is this about? (Can I put this information in my own words? Explain it to someone else?)
- Does the answer (or outcome) make sense?
- How am I doing?

When I am unable to answer the questions above, I might ask:

- What could I do to make this process more effective?
- What other strategies might work more effectively?

To check comprehension and understanding at higher levels of cognition, you might want to refer to the site on [cognitive structures](#).

4. **When we know that we do not understand, recognizing the problem and identifying a different strategy that will be more appropriate to the learning situation.** If we are unable to explain our new learning, or complete a practice problem applying this learning, we may need to find another strategy that will work more effectively. For instance, if you are unable to understand a passage after reading it, you may need to read it again, slowly. Look up words you do not know.