

What's your flavour?

Understanding your preferred learning style and the way you best absorb information could help you learn better and even enjoy the experience, writes **Amanda Williams**

I imagine two students – let's call them Roberta and Nick. Roberta did a science degree and is pretty confident with numbers. She really enjoyed doing practicals and was glad that the degree course didn't involve too many essays. Nick did a humanities degree and wrote lots of essays. He only started writing after reading around the topic thoroughly and producing mind maps.

If you have read around the subject of learning styles you may recognise the Kolb/Honey and Mumford model (activist, theorist, reflector, pragmatist) and Fleming's VAK (visual, auditory, kinaesthetic) learning preferences. Both ways of thinking about learning can help you come up with ideas about how to tackle your current course of learning.

You could probably characterise Roberta as an activist or pragmatist learner and also as a kinaesthetic learner – one who prefers to learn by touch. By contrast, Nick is a theorist/reflector and a visual learner. So what impact does that have on their ICAEW studies?

Although it's hard to find anyone who relishes plunging straight into question practice, Roberta is probably prepared to give it a go. Nick will be a bit reluctant and will want to wait until he's worked through all the topics in detail. Nick's course file is a masterpiece of cross-referencing and colourful Post-it notes and his open book text has been colour-coded using different highlighter pens.

If you have a strong preference for visual, aural or kinaesthetic learning, work with it. Visual learners can produce pictures, colour code notes and use mind maps. Aural learners might want to listen to recorded lectures and could make their own recorded notes.

Kinaesthetic learners face more of a challenge.

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Personally, I rote-learn by bouncing a ball and pacing around. I've also found it useful to write or type out key words. Writing out lists of mnemonics may not be very fashionable but it works for some people.

In terms of reflector/theorist versus activist/pragmatist, what Nick and Roberta really need to do is to take a leaf out of each other's book. Roberta needs to develop better skills for reflection, while Nick needs to put some time into question practice.

Understand your learning preferences and you'll understand why you avoid certain learning activities. Then (and this is a real test of character) do what comes hardest to you because you'll develop a wider range of learning skills. Evidence about learning styles is patchy and can be inconclusive, but one message stands up: students with a wider repertoire of learning styles and strategies are the best learners.

REFLECT AND LEARN

After tackling a question, get out a highlighter pen. Highlight something in the

answer that you knew but didn't include in your answer. Then use a different colour and highlight something that is brand new to you. Once you've tackled a question, review the related theoretical material. Think about other situations in which the theory could be applied. Find a study partner like Nick to talk to about questions.

CONFRONT PROBLEMS

Remember that what really matters is not getting the questions wrong in the real exam. Work through a question step by step and review them after each stage. Your tutors will have given you guidance on how to break down a problem. Practise questions with your notes open in front of you. And find a study partner like Roberta, who can suggest how to get started. ■

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