

Tips for Different Learning Styles

(Without Overhauling Everything)

There are four main learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing. **Visual** learners absorb information best through images, diagrams, and demonstrations. **Auditory** learners prefer listening and responding verbally. **Kinesthetic** learners thrive on hands-on activities and physical participation. **Reading/writing** learners grasp concepts most effectively through reading text and expressing themselves in writing.

Most children learn through all four learning methods, though they usually have one or two dominant styles. Knowing your child's primary learning style is helpful because it can help you make difficult subjects easier and school more enjoyable. For instance, a kinesthetic learner struggling with math might benefit from a hands-on program with manipulatives, while a visual learner may find history far more engaging with maps and illustrations.



At the same time, children need practice with all learning styles since they won't always be able to choose how information is presented. By blending different approaches—using as many senses as possible—you both support their natural strengths and build the skills they'll need in situations outside their comfort zone. Here are some practical tips for ways to help each style of learner.

Tips for Visual Learners

1) Use pictures, diagrams and other demonstrations.

When working with visual learners, it's helpful to use full color, illustrated textbooks to help them engage with the material more deeply. Diagrams and/or demonstrations are also useful for illustrating concepts. For example, as you're working through a lesson, you can help your child organize information by making a flowchart, spider diagram, or other graphic organizer to show processes and connections between concepts.

And even if you think you don't know how to draw, simple stick figures on the whiteboard can make a huge difference for comprehension and retention. The more unrealistic the stick figures look, the more likely the student will be to remember them!



Allow your child to use paintings or photos as starting points for creative writing compositions, and encourage him to use manipulatives and/or drawings to visualize math problems. Drawing pictures can be incorporated into almost any subject if the student finds drawing/painting enjoyable. For example, have your child sketch a historical event – even if it's stick figures! Or, after a visit to the park, ask him to draw a plant or insect he observed.

2) Connect assignments to something visual or imaginative

Another strategy for helping visual learners is to connect the assignment to something your child enjoys – likely, something visual or imaginative. Let's say, for example, your child loves superheroes. Consider bringing out his favorite superhero figurine during his math lesson. Tell the student that finishing his math worksheet is part of an imaginary game that will release the superhero from the villain's clutches. Seeing the superhero and imagining he's been captured can be great motivation for visual learners.



3) Color-coding

Color-coding can also help visual learners. Encourage your student to use colored pencils or pens in his assignments. For example, use a blue pencil for spelling words that use "au" and a green pencil for words that use "aw." On a history timeline, the student might enjoy writing the most important events with sparkly gel pens. If your child has trouble following instructions or schedules, try color-coding or highlighting the most important parts.



4) Educational videos

Educational videos can be good enrichment tools for visual learners, including movies set during historical periods or movie adaptations from literature. On the other hand, many documentary-type videos include a lot of visual stimulation. Some visual learners may be too distracted by the visual stimulation to process the information well.

5) Write down important information

A visual learner finds it easier to remember something he's seen and read rather than something he has heard. Consider writing important information on a note and handing it to your child. For example, "Mrs. Curtis is visiting today, so remember to clean up the living room before lunchtime."

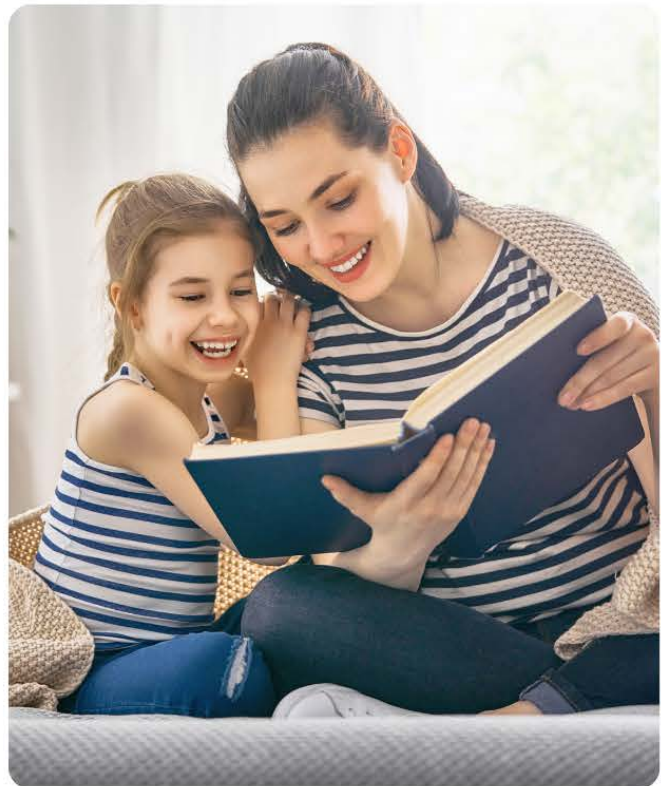
If writing the information down is not practical, try to add a visual component to your spoken instructions – dramatic gestures, for example. At the very least, make eye contact with your child so he can see your lip movement and expressions. These accompanying visuals will help your child understand, remember, and act on instructions more consistently.

Tips for Auditory Learners

Auditory learners learn best by listening, so it can be helpful to turn written or visual lessons into something they can hear or listen to.

1) Make lessons auditory

Use dramatic voices or gestures as you explain concepts from math, history, and science. Allow the student to answer review questions orally instead of in writing. You can even allow your child to dictate his writing assignments, either to you or into a voice recorder, instead of writing them down. Even for advanced students, not every writing assignment has to be an essay – substitute a few with oral presentations or speeches.



The same goes for simple memorization tasks – have your student recite flashcards, vocabulary, and spelling words out loud. Encourage your student to talk out loud to himself as he works through challenging assignments, perhaps in a different room so he won't distract his siblings. If your child is easily distracted by background noises, playing classical music can help mask the distracting sounds.

2) Audiobooks, educational videos, and songs



Insofar as possible, use audiobooks for literature and historical fiction assignments. Educational videos can be good enrichment for auditory learners, including movies set during historical periods or movie adaptations from literature. If the student struggles with a particular subject, consider switching to a program that uses a lot of lectures, such as an online class (live or recorded). For Saxon Math, the DIVE into Math lectures can be a lifesaver.

Likewise, educational songs or rhymes can help auditory learners better absorb key facts like multiplication tables or the 50 states. Check out YouTube for dozens of options, or challenge your student to make up a song to fit the information he needs to memorize.

3) Read out loud

Be sure to apply an auditory approach to your child's work as well. Though it may feel awkward at first, encourage him to talk through test questions, word problems, or anything he's working on. This can even happen while you are cooking or doing laundry. Finished an essay? Have him read it out loud to a family member. Ask him to teach new concepts to a younger sibling, his dad, a grandparent, or a peer. This requires him to verbally explain the concept – and that will help him better understand and apply the lessons learned.

To encourage independent learning, ask the student to record himself reading the lesson aloud. Later, have him listen to his own recording and try to understand it without your help. This will help him work independently while ensuring he has the auditory engagement he needs.

4) Bring it back to what he can hear

Overall, if you're supporting an auditory learner, it's helpful to keep bringing lessons back to what he can hear, not just what he can read. Remember the Mrs. Curtis example from the visual learner section? For a visual learner, it would be most effective to hand him a written note or write the information on a whiteboard. But if you're working with an auditory learner, you'll want to make a point of telling your child directly, "Mrs. Curtis is visiting today, so remember to clean up the living room before lunchtime." Talking aloud about instructions and schedules will help your child to understand and remember the information.



Tips for Kinesthetic Learners

A kinesthetic – or “tactile” – learner does best when he is actively engaged in his own education. These students thrive in less traditional learning environments – movement, testing, and trial and error help them to retain and apply what they have learned.

1) Act out instructions

How to engage kinesthetic learners? Start by having students write or act out instructions and information – for example, have students write vocabulary and spelling words multiple times. Encourage the student to count off the steps in a process on his fingers, or use his hand or arm movements to talk through an event in a story. The student should use manipulatives to work through math problems. Cooking math is another good way to reinforce math for kinesthetic learners.



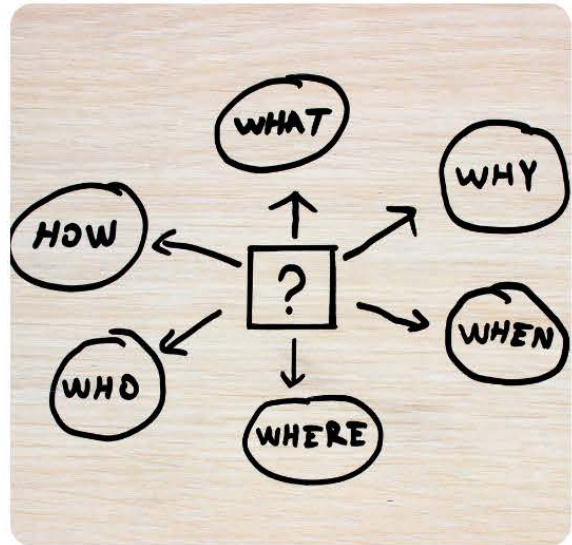
Physical movements can serve as memory cues, so educational songs and rhythms are also good strategies – ask your child to tap his knee, clap, or snap along while memorizing and reciting information. Involve your child in any active prep work for the lesson – have your child create his own flashcards, make his own visual aids, and gather supplies for hands-on activities.

2) Incorporate movement games

You can also integrate fun movement games. One of my favorites? Have your child stand at the bottom of the stairs while you quiz him on spelling words. As he spells the word aloud, have him jump up one step for each letter in the word – so as he spells “house,” have him jump up one step for “h,” one for “o,” and so on. No stairs? Put pieces of paper on the floor in a circle and have your child jump from one to the next as he spells out each word. (Tell him to pretend the floor is lava!) This will reinforce spelling in a way that resonates with a kinesthetic learner. You can use this same activity to practice math facts and other information.

3) Use graphic organizers

In that vein, keep in mind kinesthetic learners may benefit from using graphic organizers to process information – similar to visual learners. Flowcharts, spider diagrams, and Venn diagrams aren't as hands-on as a science experiment, but they are more hands-on than just reading a textbook. Be sure to have the student create the graphic organizer himself.



4) Use an active approach

To reinforce learning and encourage retention, ask your student to share what he's learned in a concrete, physical way – demonstrating and explaining a science experiment to siblings, acting out a historical event or a scene from literature for Dad, or teaching a math concept with manipulatives to grandparents through a recorded video, for starters.

The same active approach should be followed for evaluations. Consider substituting hands-on projects for essays and reports. Instead of writing an essay on the Crusades, for instance, have your child create a model of a medieval fortress and explain its features to family members in an oral presentation. Yes, junior-high and high school students should still learn how to write a good essay, but it isn't necessary for every assignment to follow that format



When written assignments are necessary, connect them to something active that the child enjoys – an essay on the Crusades could focus on medieval armor and weaponry, for example, and as part of the assignment the student could create model weapons and demonstrate how they were used.

5) Hands-on activities

As you're curriculum planning, you'll want to keep these best practices and activities in mind. Be sure to integrate lessons that include lots of hands-on activities. Check out [The Treasure Trove of Literature](#) series and the hands-on projects included in CHC's lesson plans for [From Sea to Shining Sea](#) and [All Ye Lands](#). Here, you'll find lots of games, drama skits, crafts, and cooking projects you can dive into immediately.



6) Short breaks to help focus

One final tip for engaging kinesthetic learners: be sure and build in time in your day for frequent, short breaks so your student can release energy and refresh focus. Some families find that having their kinesthetic child run around the house every 15 minutes can do wonders for his concentration. In between those breaks, try letting your child study in a rocking chair, or pace back and forth while he listens or reads.



Tips for Reading/Writing Learners

Given the nature of traditional education – which leans heavily on reading and writing – reading/writing learners have a bit of an advantage in the classroom.



1) Encourage independent learning

Reading/writing learners are well equipped to take on – and learn from – tasks such as reading a book or passage silently or out loud to themselves. Provide dictionaries, glossaries, and other written resources for your child to learn from. Allow the student to read review and test questions and respond on paper. Repetition is also a good strategy – ask your child to rewrite important information in his own words for greater retention.

2) Note-taking

Note-taking can also benefit the reading/writing learner. At the appropriate level, have the student take notes on projects, experiments, and reading, making use of lists and headings to organize information on paper. Notes can also be organized by symbol or color. Younger reading/writing students can try writing captions or descriptions for images, while more advanced students can try out different kinds of note-taking, including Cornell's Notes, mind-mapping, annotating, and marking in the book when possible.

3) Make it engaging

For reading/writing learners, it can be easy to fall into a “boring textbook” approach to education. Whereas Karl the Kinesthetic Learner cannot endure school without hands-on activities, Rita the Reading/Writing Learner can plod away at reading and writing all day long. But that doesn’t mean Rita won’t eventually get burned out and lose her love for learning.

It’s still important to add some “spice” into Rita’s education through visual, auditory, and hands-on aids. Hands-on activities are enjoyable to most students, and historical fiction and literature is especially attractive for reading/writing learners. Plus, using multiple senses when learning is a powerful way to increase the child’s retention, regardless of the child’s primary learning style. See the Tips for Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic Learners above for concrete ideas on how to utilize different senses.



4) Help them learn other skills

Another thing to look out for with a reading/writing child is that he or she develops the ability to learn through other methods, especially auditory skills. This is especially important if the student has plans to attend college, since it requires auditory learning skills to follow college lectures.

An enjoyable way to develop auditory learning skills is to have your reading/writing child occasionally listen to audiobooks – whether for historical fiction, literature, or simply for entertainment. Following the story in an auditory format will likely require careful attention for a reading/writing child, but will gradually become easier as he develops his listening skills.

In high school, it would be ideal for a reading/writing learner to attend an online class or watch a series of video lectures in order to practice listening and note-taking skills. This will prepare him to learn from college lectures.

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