

## LEARNING STYLES

Each museum visitor has very different patterns for receiving new information and processing it. A person's unique pattern for doing these things is called **learning style** (also referred to as **cognitive style**). When presenting works of art to a group it is important to consider the differences you will find among group members.

### Modality Preference Differences

Some learners prefer to see what they are to learn, some are better *hearing* about it and discussing it, and some learn better when physically *touching* what it is they are to learn. Therefore, it is important to use a variety of ways to teach about any work of art (with the understanding that you are limited by what you can incorporate on a one-hour tour in the galleries).

The **visual learner** will do very well by looking at the art work. Be sure that all visitors can see it. As you ask questions about the work, you will be helping the **auditory learners** in the group but be sure to repeat the main points of your discussion, so that **non-auditory** learners have at least two chances to process the information. This is done well through paraphrasing. Having students (younger and older) use paper and pencil to copy a pattern, for example, will be helpful to **visual learners**. Having paper and pencils on a tour is often impractical, by having children pretend to paint, draw or trace a pattern or shape can be a good substitute when in the galleries. For the **kinesthetic learners** in the group, pass touchable props or have them participate in improvisational activities, such as imitating shapes or actions in a work of art. These learners cannot sit still in one place for very long, so attention to the pacing of your tour will be especially important for them.

### Field Sensitivity Differences

Some visitors will be better at finding details in the art work. They will see more and make more connections. Others will need more help in knowing where and how to look. This style is not intelligence related.

### Cognitive Tempo Differences

The “impulsives” in your group will be the first to raise their hands or blurt out an answer. For the best, most reasoned responses you will be wise to allow ample “wait time” so that the “reflectives” can construct their answers after searching all alternative answers. If you can recognize the “impulsives” in your group, be sure to call on them for reactions and follow-up responses to the “reflectives” answers.

### **Conceptual Level**

Formulate your questions according to the degree of structure your group need in order to learn. For some individuals, you can ask more complex, elaborative, open-ended questions and expect high-quality responses. For others, you will need shorter, simpler questions.

### **Risk-taking Differences**

You will find out very quickly that some learners are more willing offer their observations than others. It is important to build risk-taking as a viable learning strategy through open-ended questions that are open to divergent responses. It takes time to build an atmosphere of trust in which both your high- and low-risk takers will attempt something new. Your guidance will make all the difference in how far your group will go in exploring new ideas about a work of art.