



Use Multisensory Approaches

Five suggestions for implementing multisensory instruction:

1. **GET STUDENTS MOVING.**

- When brainstorming...
 - Instead of always handing students a K-W-L sheet, try a Round-Robin Brainstorm. Post larger pieces of paper on the walls with the topic and subtopics. Place students in small groups to generate knowledge and questions on each sheet. At the end of a set time, have groups shift to the next paper, read what's written, and add more, thus gaining exposure to and inspiration from others' ideas.
- When teaching about how a bill becomes law in the United States...
 - Instead of only reading the textbook or looking at a diagram, try assigning students roles to research (congresspeople, senators, etc.) and doing a simulation.

2. **PRESENT ESSENTIAL CONCEPTS FROM THE SUBJECT IN MULTIPLE FORMATS.**

- When teaching Shakespeare...
 - Instead of only reading key scenes, try watching different versions of them online and identifying the different interpretations, or try performing scenes.
- When teaching velocity and acceleration...
 - Instead of simply reading about it and doing the calculations, try building ramps and vehicles, testing them out, and talking about how these activities make the math real.

3. **MAKE SURE STUDENTS ARE DOING SOMETHING WITH INFORMATION.**

- When asking students to read the textbook for homework...
 - Instead of merely assigning reading, try asking them to list the main ideas on a sheet of notepaper, or place sticky-notes in the text with questions and ideas, or paraphrase the chapter summary.
- When asking students to review for a test...
 - Instead of telling them to study, try putting key information or concepts on notecards or strips of paper, and ask students to categorize them (e.g., literary characters by quotes or traits, vocabulary with definitions, events with dates or cause/effect).

4. **OFFER OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR KNOWLEDGE.**

- When it's time to assess what students have learned...
 - Instead of always giving a multiple choice or essay test, try discussing with students other ways they can show what they've learned. (e.g., A song, a play, a tabletop demonstration, or a short film can all fulfill the objectives you set.)



5. SOLICIT INPUT FROM STUDENTS ON WHAT KINDS OF TEACHING HELP THEM LEARN BEST.

- Give students questionnaires that help both them and you gain a better understanding of their learning styles. (e.g., Are they more visual or auditory learners?)
- Ask students to reflect on different types of lessons you've implemented. What did they enjoy? What was difficult? What types of activities helped them understand and remember new information?

Seeing • Hearing • Touching • Tasting • Smelling

KEEP IN MIND:

Learning is far more complex than simply perceiving sensory stimuli.

- Our brains process and act upon those stimuli through a complex interplay of cognitive ability, executive function, personality, and motivation.
- By taking these and other factors into consideration, Howard Gardner's concept of multiple intelligences (often called learning styles) and Robert Sternberg's work on thinking styles and practical intelligence provide a rich explanation that we can use to enhance not only what we teach in our classrooms, but how we teach it.

RECOMMENDED READING...

- For more information on Round Robin Brainstorming, see *Teaching Independent Minds*, A Landmark School Teaching Guide (2008) ~ Patricia W. Newhall
- If you are skeptical about assessing skills and knowledge through activities other than tests, check out the popular National History Day options for young historians (www.nhd.org).

We also recommend the following books:

- *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (2000) ~ Howard Gardner
- *Thinking Styles* (1999) ~ Robert J. Sternberg
- *Teaching for Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity and Success* (2009) ~ Robert J. Sternberg, Linda Jarvin, and Elena L. Grigorenko

Students learn in different ways, so use multisensory approaches!