

THE PROFESSIONAL FLIGHT INSTRUCTOR

# MENTOR

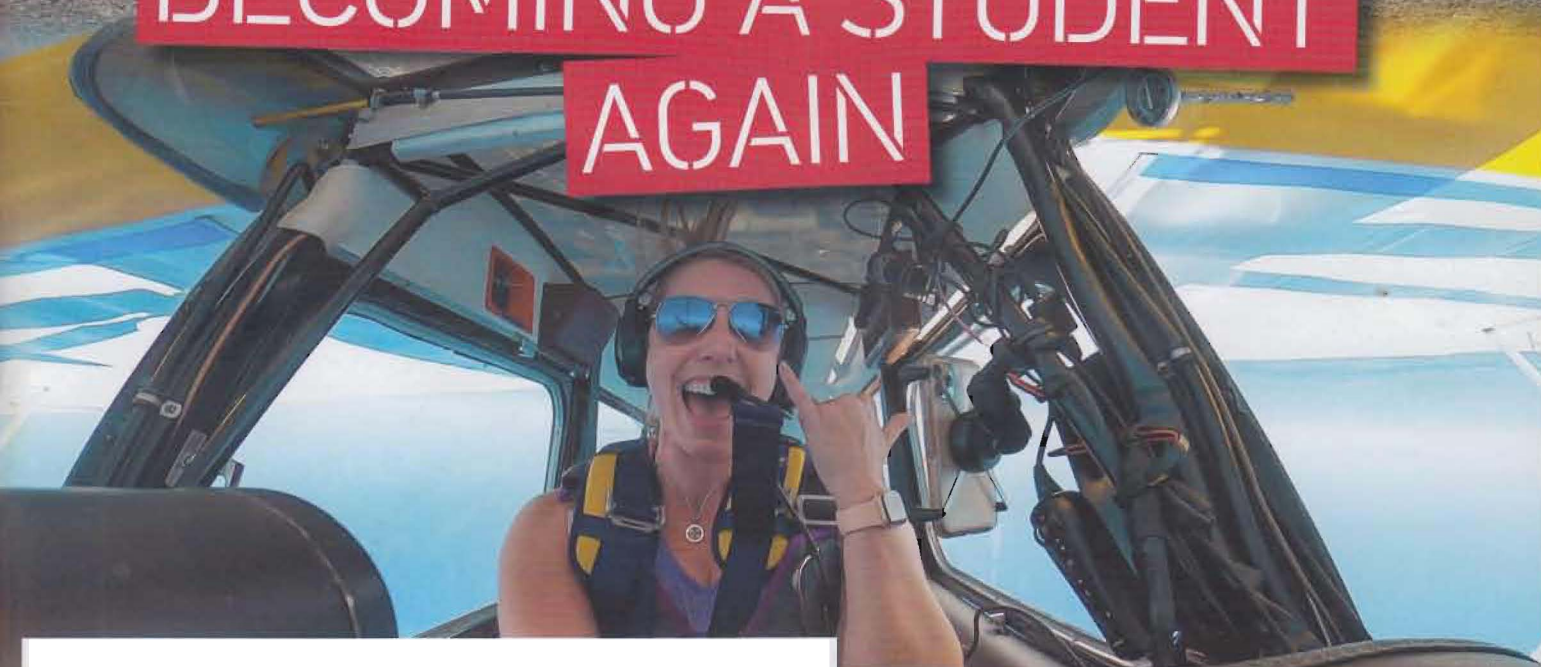


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## BECOMING A STUDENT AGAIN



- NAFI At EAA AirVenture
- Student Learning Styles
- Why Do People Want to Fly?



By Jason Blair

# Learning Styles and Your Students

Identifying strengths and weaknesses boosts success



■ Way back in 1999, when I was working on a master's degree in a nonaviation field I thought I might use until I finally realized how much I was in love with flying. I worked for Western Michigan University's Academic Skills Center. The goal of the center was to help students improve their academic performance, including tutoring sessions. One thing I got tasked with was presenting a series of seminars called the "College Success Seminars." The seminars covered things like time management, resource management, and a topic I didn't realize how much it would be of use to me later — learning styles for students.

I remember teaching freshmen college students about how their learning styles might affect how they learn. Were they auditory learners who best recall information presented to them to which they listen? Or perhaps kinesthetic, learning more effectively through physical activities or tactical senses? Many people are visual learners who are best able to recall and learn from things they have seen. Yet others are more able to learn effectively from reading or writing.

When I was teaching these differences, and the fact that everyone has tendencies they can identify and use to best learn, I hadn't yet made the con-



nection to how this would affect how I would teach my students when I became an instructor.

I was already a pilot at this point, but it was also about the time I decided to get my flight instructor certificate. It seemed logical to me at the time, but I also had a little bit of a different background. Both of my parents were teachers, and I generally approached much of my life already from a "how to teach this" mindset. Teaching came naturally for me. I know it isn't for everyone, and that's OK; it can be a learned skill. What was even better, and fortunate for me, was that I liked teaching!

As I pursued my CFI, I dug into FAA publication information from the *Aviation Instructor's Handbook* and started to notice how the information in Chapter 3, "The Learning Process," (see graph below) coincided with what I was teaching in the seminars. Combining applications of the material made me learn the material more effectively. Which, um, is kind of the point of learning styles.

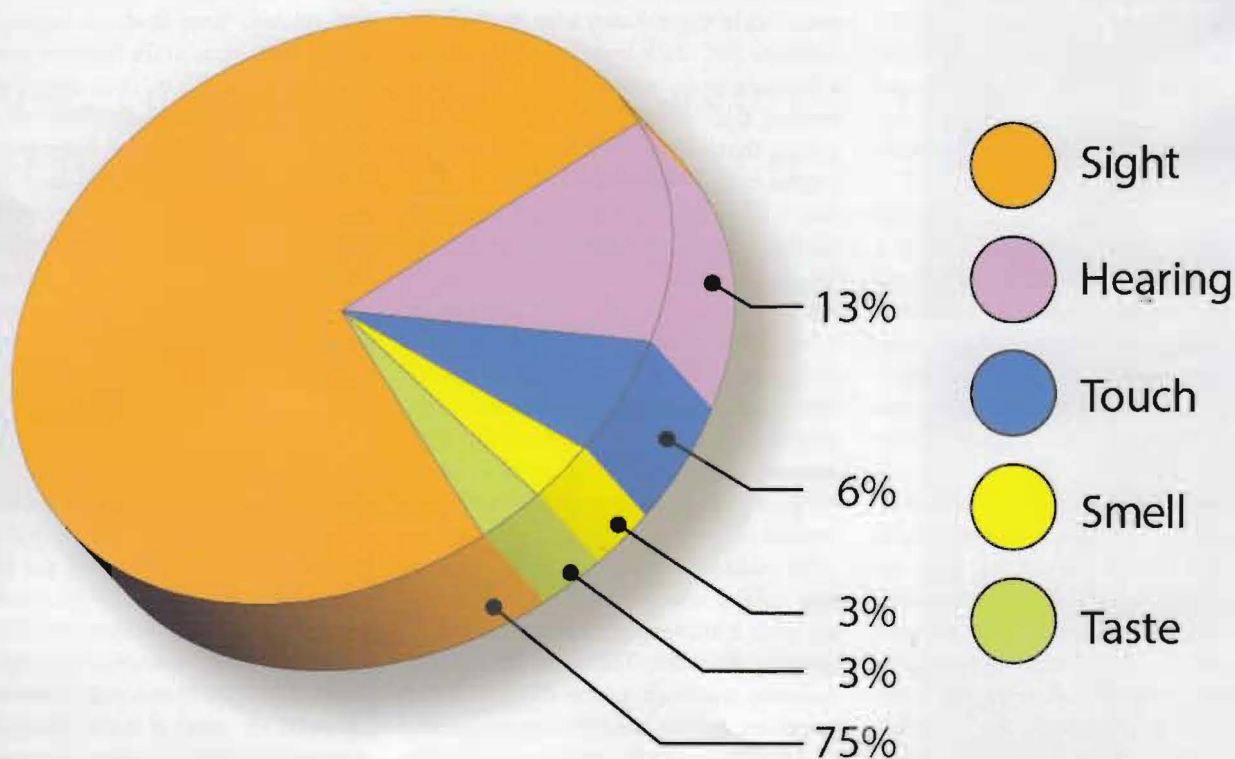
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Bringing this back to context for you as the reader, I know that learning about learning styles and much of the material in the fundamentals of instruction topic is a bit abstract in the beginning, but the more you use it the more it becomes relevant.

Specifically, digging into the topic of learning styles is important as a CFI to try to identify and understand how your students best learn the material you are going to present. This is the material they are going to study and what they will need to recall, apply, and correlate with the rest of the pilot training.

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I am a talker as a teacher. It is just naturally how I present information. That doesn't work for a student who needs to read information to really learn it. It takes me identifying through some discussion and potentially quizzing to determine if a student of mine isn't learning from me verbally teaching them. If I find that is the case, it is incumbent on me as the CFI to find another way to present the information. It might be by incorporating the demonstration-performance method





and going and doing something actually in the air, or finding a supplemental textual resource for my student to read, depending on their learning style.

If you are working with students, you can leverage the same learning styles to best present information to your students in a way that will help them be able to retain the information they have been presented. In fact, breaking the learning styles into different focal areas is generally referred to as the "VARK Model." This includes the visual, auditory, reading, and kinesthetic methods of learning. You can learn more about the VARK modalities specifically at [VARK-Learn.com/introduction-to-vark/the-vark-modalities](http://VARK-Learn.com/introduction-to-vark/the-vark-modalities). There is also a great resource available at ScienceDirect titled "Different Perspectives of Learning Styles from VARK Model" by Norasmah Othman and Mohd Hasril Amiruddin that digs deeper, assuming you are as nerdy as me and want to learn more. It can be found at [tinyurl.com/225wa8eu](http://tinyurl.com/225wa8eu).

Some students are going to have learning styles that strongly allow them to learn from reading and seeing pictures. A truly kinesthetic learner might need to go well beyond the picture of how flaps work and take a trip out into the hangar to see them in person. They might need to touch them, move them, and see how they physically work.

The good news for us as CFIs in the modern learning environment is that a wide variety of resources are available to use to present information to students. We can send them videos as homework. We can have them sign up for and watch FAA Safety Team presentations. Or we can send them articles or books from which they can learn.

If we reference how effective different learning styles in general are, we might also find ourselves modifying how we teach our students. A good instructor will work to present information to students using methods that maximize retention of learning. In a general sense, the more engaged a learner is with the material, the better they will retain that information. This is exemplified by the fact that

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teaching the material leads to the highest level of retention. For many CFIs, we have learned that teaching is the final step in our own personal learning.


This can also be addictive. Those instructors in the industry who are the best combine and stack learning styles. From a learning perspective, we also find that reading the material first and then following that up with a guided discussion enhances the retention rate. This means that a CFI who is working with students can enhance their students' learning by doing something such as assigning reading for homework and then discussing it with the student at the next lesson. It enhances the learning even further if they then go out and practice something they have learned. Additive methods of presenting and practicing learning items enhance the learning process and the retention of learned material.

An additional challenge some instructors might encounter could be working with a student who is affected by a learning disorder. These might include dyslexia, auditory processing disorder, attention deficit disorder, or dyscalculia (challenges with numbers and math concepts) to name just a few. While

medicated management of some learning disorders may result in FAA medical ramifications, a large number of students may be able to manage the challenges with these learning concerns. A good instructor will take the time to help them understand how they can learn best and help present information in a manner that works with their learning strengths, not trying to present material through their weaknesses.

An instructor who wants to learn more about some of these potential learning disorders could visit [USNews.com/education/k12/articles/understanding-different-types-of-learning-disabilities](http://USNews.com/education/k12/articles/understanding-different-types-of-learning-disabilities) to start.

The key to the discussion here is that everyone has strengths and weaknesses in their learning processes. Those of your students may not be the same as yours as a CFI. Understanding the intricacies of different learning processes can allow you as a CFI to work with your students to present material in a manner that will best further their learning. This takes work as an instructor.

Identifying how a student will best learn takes effort. It means you have to engage with your students beyond just telling them to read the book or study for the knowledge test on their own. Take the time as a CFI to understand the differences in learning styles and leverage them. Build a toolkit of material that ranges from videos, written articles, and books to real-world presentation moments you can use with your students. Doing this can set you apart from lesser dedicated instructors and enhance your students' success in their learning process. 

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*Jason Blair is a single- and multiengine instructor and FAA designated pilot examiner. He has more than 6,000 hours of total time, with 3,000 hours of instruction given and 3,000 hours in aircraft as a DPE, and has issued more than 2,000 pilot certificates. He works with multiple aviation associations focusing on pilot training and testing. His experience as a pilot and instructor spans nearly 20 years and includes more than 100 makes and models of aircraft flown. Blair has published many articles in aviation publications with a primary focus on training and safety.*