

The Myth of 'Learning Styles'

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In the early '90s, a New Zealand man named Neil Fleming [decided](#) to sort through something that had puzzled him during his time monitoring classrooms as a school inspector. In the course of watching 9,000 different classes, he noticed that only some teachers were able to reach each and every one of their students. What were they doing differently?

In other words, “there’s evidence that people do try to treat tasks in accordance with what they believe to be their learning style, but it doesn’t help them,” says Daniel Willingham, a psychologist at the University of Virginia. In 2015, he reviewed the literature on learning styles and [concluded that](#) “learning styles theories have not panned out.”

In our conversation, Willingham brought up another study, [published in 2009](#), in which people who said they liked to think visually or verbally really did try to think that way: Self-proclaimed visualizers tried to create an image, and self-proclaimed verbalizers tried to form words. But, there was a rub, he said: “If you’re a visualizer and I give you pictures, you don’t remember pictures any better than anyone who says they’re verbalizer.”