

HOW DO YOU LEARN?

Understanding the Three Types of Learners

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One of the threads that links the jobs of group exercise instructor and personal trainer is communication: Everyone cues. In order to guarantee the richest communication experience for everyone, every time, this review of the three methods for *conveying* meaning can assist fitness professionals to amplify their understanding of three-part cues.

The purposes of cueing are many. Among their uses, cues can reference breathing, rhythm, alignment, numerical order, direction, spatial orientation, movement, anatomical references and even humor. The more understanding a communicator has about the three types of cueing, the greater the possibilities for fitness listeners to reach deeper levels of meaning and, consequently, reach goals more efficiently.

LEARNING STYLES AND CUEING METHODS

The three types of learners are visual, auditory and kinesthetic. Before attempting a new behavior, the visual learner needs to *see* behavior, the auditory learner needs to hear detailed explanations, and the kinesthetic learner needs to acquire a sense of feeling something new before mastery occurs.

As there are three types of learners, so, too, do three types of cues exist. With visual cues, the communicator demonstrates a desired behavior with body language, making the eyes the main conduit. This student is a “watcher.” With auditory cues, the communicator explains a desired behavior, making the ears the main conduit for learning to occur. This student is a “listener.” With kinesthetic cues, the communicator combines visual, verbal and touching cues so that the receiver acquires an understanding of how a behavior should feel. This student is a “feeler.”

While most learners rely on a combination of cueing types for learning to occur, almost everyone has one (subconscious) preferred technique for learning (Faulkner). Unfortunately, there exists no sure way to determine if one’s primary learning preference is visual, verbal or kinesthetic. However, a helpful method is to sit in a quiet room with closed eyes. Imagine that, to learn a new skill,

either recorded descriptions could be played via a sound system, or a video could be played with no sound. A person’s first reaction to the choice “which would I prefer” helps determine if his or her primary learning technique is initially auditory or visual. An alternative method is to decide one’s preference between reading the closed-captions on the evening news with the sound muted or listening to the news without looking at the TV screen.

Effective fitness cuers fuse an understanding of the three different types of learners when they form what Mindy Mylrea calls the “three-part cue.” Mylrea, recipient of the 2004 Can Fit Pro International Presenter of the Year and of the 1999 International IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year Award, says, “the most effective cues contain aspects that address the visual, verbal and kinesthetic learner so that nobody gets left out.” To better understand how to create three-part cues, the following sections may help.

THE “EYES” THE LIMIT: CREATING EFFECTIVE VISUAL CUES

All trainers can increase their communication efficiency output if they can imagine their class as deaf or as speakers of a foreign language. Nothing said matters; only visual cues count. Deaf participants rely on everything that they *see* at all times. When cueing for any of the reasons mentioned in the introduction, trainers should try to complement words with appropriate body language to assist in conveying meaning. Yury Miankovich, personal trainer at NShape Fitness based in Hanoi, Vietnam, suggests “just getting into the habit of pointing to the left or right every time we say ‘left’ or ‘right’ with the appropriate hand gives visual learners a directional cue. Since I teach to multicultural and [multilingual] students, visual cueing also helps everyone understand where we’re going next from what they see instead of me having to choose a specific language.” Lyndsay Murray-Kashoid, instructor at Exhale Spa based in Dallas, Texas, agrees. “I also point to muscles on my own body when referencing muscles like ‘obliques’ and ‘latissimus dorsi,’ for example, so that everyone at least knows instantly a general area of where we

TABLE 1: MORE VISUAL CUES

When identifying a muscle group such as "erector spinae"	Move your fingers down your lower neck and spine to the lumbar area to show where these muscles run
When saying "come forward"	Indicate with both hands a forward motion, "calling" the students forward with the hands
When showing how many more repetitions remain	Indicate this with fingers prominently displayed for all to see
When previewing/demonstrating a move yourself for everyone to see	Invite the class to face you first to enjoy greater visual access, possibly indicating those in front to be on the floor and those toward the back of the room to stand
When giving positive feedback	Indicate this visually with a "thumbs up" sign, smile or other visual feedback

will be targeting. I also use my hands as models to show where and how these muscles contract." Such techniques combine visual aspects of cueing with traditional verbal comments. Table 1 offers additional examples.

RUN TO YOUR "EARS": CREATING EFFECTIVE AUDITORY CUES

Trainers can heighten an awareness of visual cues by choosing sentences as if their class were blind. Blind students require succinct and precise cues. Commonly heard fitness cues like "good job," "do it this way," and "if that's too difficult, try this," are nonspecific cues that alienate rather than invite, because a blind person (and verbal learner) would not be able to follow. "I try to make my cues short and specific enough," Miankovich says, "so everyone can follow me on my voice alone, especially at times when they can't see me, like in Downward-Facing Dog."

When choosing words, Neuro-Linguistic Programming tells us that tone and body language are just as important as the words themselves (Morgan). With tone alone there are over a dozen ways to say the four words "We're gonna do squats." Word choice also counts: Words should be positive. Avoid the word "don't" to keep a focus on the desired behaviors rather than potential problems. Jeremy Koerber, author of *101 Ways to Improve Your Personal Training Business*, agrees, stating, "just cueing what you want avoids spending time focusing on negative behaviors you want to avoid anyway. Instead of 'don't hold your breath,' I suggest 'keep breathing,' or, instead of 'don't let your knees go past your toes in the squats,' I use 'keep the knees behind the toes when you sit back.'" Cueing in the positive realm helps everyone focus on desired results faster. Table 2 offers some additional examples of effective verbal cues.

LEAVING IMPRESSIONS IN THE "HANDS" OF TIME: CREATING EFFECTIVE KINESTHETIC CUES

The third type of cueing, kinesthetic cueing, addresses all five senses with an emphasis on touch. Where the visual learner needs to *see* what an exercise is, and the verbal learner needs to *hear* where an exercise takes place, the kinesthetic learner needs to *feel* an exercise. Some learners profit most from a combination of both verbal and visual cues, which provides a more complete cueing experience. These kinesthetic learners do best when they relate to both where and how they are supposed to feel a certain exercise in their own bodies. Cuers should incorporate the word "feeling" as well as visual cues, indicating on their own body parts where sensations should occur when teaching movement. "During abdominal crunches," states Miankovich, "I not only show on my own body where the muscle runs to help them identify the focus of the exercise, but also tell them that they should feel a strong attraction activation down the front of the torso, between the ribs and the hips."

The kinesthetic learner needs to understand how everything comes together for a particular feeling. So, the kinesthetic approach to cueing involves telling participants both *where* they should feel movements and *how* these movements should feel. Depending on the regulations of each specific club and country, a gentle touch to a client on a key body part (with the client's permission) may enhance further the participant's kinesthetic learning (Rothenberg).

Advantages to understanding the kinesthetic learning process include corrective techniques. Corrections for kinesthetic learners sometimes require instructors to interact on a more personal level. The technique of

