

## A Crash Course on Multiple Intelligence Theory

When working with a wide range of students, it is important to know that students also have a wide range of learning styles. Understanding the different learning styles can help you to better assist and communicate with a student. If you are hitting a block in communication, try varying your methods and styles of delivery. The following article by Thomas Armstrong, Ph.D., can guide you in identifying different learning styles and applying different approaches to successfully convey information.

### The Theory

The theory of multiple intelligences was developed in 1983 by Dr. Howard Gardner, professor of education at Harvard University. It suggests that the traditional notion of intelligence, based on I.Q. testing, is far too limited. Instead, Dr. Gardner proposes eight\* different intelligences to account for a broader range of human potential in children and adults. These intelligences are:

- Verbal/Linguistic – “Word Smart”
- Logical/Mathematical – “Math Smart”
- Musical/Rhythmic – “Music Smart”
- Bodily/Kinesthetic – “Body Smart”
- Visual/Spatial – “Art Smart”
- Naturalist – “Nature Smart”
- Intrapersonal – “Self Smart”
- Interpersonal – “People Smart”

\*Gardner has since added a ninth intelligence, Existential Intelligence: “wondering smart” - to exhibit the proclivity to pose and ponder questions about life, death and ultimate realities.

### Assess Your Own Strengths

Take the Multiple Intelligence quiz on the Government of Canada’s Jobs, Workers, Training and Careers page – an excellent resource for learning strategies to suit all intelligences. [Go there now!](#)

Dr. Gardner says that our schools and culture focus most of their attention on linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence. We esteem the highly articulate or logical people of our culture. However, Dr. Gardner says that we should also place equal attention on individuals who show gifts in the other intelligences: the artists, architects, musicians, naturalists, designers, dancers, therapists, entrepreneurs, and others who enrich the world in which we live.

Unfortunately, many children who have these gifts don’t receive much reinforcement for them in school. Many of these kids, in fact, end up being labeled “learning disabled,” ADD (attention deficit disorder), or simply underachievers, when their unique ways of thinking and learning aren’t addressed by a heavily linguistic or logical-mathematical classroom. The theory of multiple intelligences proposes a major transformation in the way our schools are run. It suggests that teachers be trained to present their lessons in a wide variety of ways using music, cooperative learning, art activities, role play, multimedia, field trips, inner reflection, and much more.

### M.I. and Adult Learners

The theory of multiple intelligences also has strong implications for adult learning and development. Many adults find themselves in jobs that do not make optimal use of their most highly developed intelligences (for example, the highly bodily-kinesthetic individual who is stuck in a linguistic or logical desk-job when he or she would be much happier in a job where they could move around, such as a recreational leader, a forest ranger, or physical therapist). The

theory of multiple intelligences gives adults a whole new way to look at their lives, examining potentials that they left behind in their childhood (such as a love for art or drama) but now have the opportunity to develop through courses, hobbies, or other programs of self-development. One of the most remarkable features of the theory of multiple intelligences is how it provides eight different potential pathways to learning. If a teacher is having difficulty reaching a student in the more traditional linguistic or logical ways of instruction, the theory of multiple intelligences suggests several other ways in which the material might be presented to facilitate effective learning. Whether you are a kindergarten teacher, a graduate school instructor, or an adult learner seeking better ways of pursuing self-study on any subject of interest, the same basic guidelines apply. Whatever you are teaching or learning, see how you might connect it with:

- Words (linguistic intelligence)
- Numbers or logic (logical-mathematical intelligence)
- Pictures (spatial intelligence)
- Music (musical intelligence)
- Self-reflection (intrapersonal intelligence)
- A physical experience (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence)
- A social experience (interpersonal intelligence)
- An experience in the natural world (naturalist intelligence)

For example, if you're teaching or learning about the law of supply and demand in economics, you might read about it (linguistic), study mathematical formulas that express it (logical-mathematical), examine a graphic chart that illustrates the principle (spatial), observe the law in the natural world (naturalist) or in the human world of commerce (interpersonal); examine the law in terms of your own body [e.g. when you supply your body with lots of food, the hunger demand goes down; when there's very little supply, your stomach's demand for food goes way up and you get hungry] (bodily-kinesthetic and intrapersonal); and/or write a song (or find an existing song) that demonstrates the law (perhaps Dylan's "Too Much of Nothing?"). You don't have to teach or learn something in all eight ways, just see what the possibilities are, and then decide which particular pathways interest you the most, or seem to be the most effective teaching or learning tools. The theory of multiple intelligences is so intriguing because it expands our horizon of available teaching/learning tools beyond the conventional linguistic and logical methods used in most schools (e.g. lecture, textbooks, writing assignments, formulas, etc.). To get started, put the topic of whatever you're interested in teaching or learning about in the center of a blank sheet of paper, and draw eight straight lines or "spokes" radiating out from this topic. Label each line with a different intelligence. Then start brainstorming ideas for teaching or learning that topic and write down ideas next to each intelligence (this is a spatial-linguistic approach of brainstorming; you might want to do this in other ways as well, using a tape-recorder, having a group brainstorming session, etc.).