The Power of your Senses

Using NLP Representational Systems to improve how you communicate, relate and learn

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The Power of Our Senses

We can only take in the world through our five senses. We see, hear, feel, taste and smell the outside world - there is no other way to get it into your brain! What many people are unaware of is that we all use our senses differently and this impacts how we prefer to communicate, relate and learn, to name but a few areas of life this impacts.

In Neuro Linguistic Programme (NLP) we explore this concept in depth and apply and use it to help people set goals, change behaviour and even take out phobias! In this guide we will give you a brief introduction to the concept and you have the opportunity to take a short quiz to find out your preferred and least preferred sense - and what that means for you in your life. It’s a powerful concept used by professional communicators, public speakers, sales people, leaders and teachers all over the world and you too can get a good sense of it in the next ten minutes.

Representational Systems in NLP are how we ‘re-present’ the world and our experience inside ourselves and communicate that back out to others in our language and how we behave. The Systems we use are:

Visual (V) - Pictures, words, imagination
Auditory (A) - words, sounds
Kinaesthetic (K) - internal feelings and emotions, external touch
Olfactory (O) - Smell
Gustatory (G) - Taste

There is a sixth system we use in NLP called Auditory Digital (Ad). This is a non sensory system and refers to how we sort experience once we have taken in it - so for example our self talk, logic and process.

For the sake of test we will use the four primary systems because Olfactory and Gustatory are not normally a primary sense for most people - it’s why smells and tastes are so powerful - because they stand out!

Ready to find out more?
Quick Quiz - The Representational System Test

For each of the following statements, please place a number next to every phrase. Use the following system to indicate your preferences:

4 = Closest to describing you  2 = Next best
3 = Next best description  1 = Least descriptive of you

1. I make important decisions based on:
   ___ gut level feelings.
   ___ which way sounds the best.
   ___ what looks best to me.
   ___ precise review and study of the issues.

2. During an argument, I am most likely to be influenced by:
   ___ the other person's tone of voice.
   ___ whether or not I can see the other person's argument.
   ___ the logic of the other person's argument.
   ___ whether or not I feel I am in touch with other person's true feelings.

3. I most easily communicate what is going on with me by:
   ___ the way I dress and look.
   ___ the feelings I share.
   ___ the words I choose.
   ___ the tone of my voice.

4. It is easiest for me to:
   ___ find the ideal volume and tuning on a stereo system
   ___ select the most intellectually relevant point concerning an interesting subject
   ___ select the most comfortable furniture
   ___ select rich, attractive colour combinations

5. ___ I am very attuned to the sounds of my surroundings.
   ___ I am very adept at making sense of new facts and data.
   ___ I am very sensitive to the way articles of clothing feel on my body.
   ___ I have a strong response to colours and to the way a room looks.

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Quick Quiz - Scoring Your Preferences

STEP ONE:

Copy your answers from the test to the lines below.

1. ____K 2. ____A 3. ____V
   ____A  ____V  ____K
   ____V  ____Ad  ____Ad
   ____Ad  ____K  ____A

4. ____A 5. ____A
   ____Ad  ____Ad
   ____K  ____K
   ____V  ____V

STEP TWO: Add the numbers associated with each letter. There will be five entries for each letter.

<table>
<thead>
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<th></th>
<th>V</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>Ad</th>
<th>K</th>
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STEP THREE:

The comparison of the totalled scores gives the relative preference for each of the four major representational systems.
Your Strongest System

Your strongest system will be the one you use the most, rely on to make decisions, process information and communicate with others. The higher your score is the stronger your preference is, if you scored high in two categories then read the description of both systems.

Visual (V)
People with a preference for the visual system sort the world by how it looks. What they see is more important than what they hear or feel. They will use picture descriptions a lot in their language like see, appear, view, look and will often look up as that is how we access pictures in our minds. When communicating with someone with a visual preference, give them something to ‘look’ over or use pictures or diagrams, they may find it hard to process talking through alone. This is also essential to their learning style. Visual preference people can be very creative and are often attracted to professional that make the most of those skills.

Auditory (A)
For people with an Auditory preference, what they hear is more important than what they see or feel. They prefer to talk things through over reading something, so may well call you to discuss the email you just sent! They are very attuned to tone, pace and the quality of sounds which often means they love music and may even play well. It also means they are very attuned to tone of voice and precise language (they remember exactly what other people said). They learn by listening and discussion and debate is important to Auditory so they won’t make quick decisions on important things, they will need to discuss it. They prefer to speak than to email or text. People with this preference may avoid eye contact, preferring to ‘give you their ear’, which can cause communication issues with people who have other preferences.

Kinaesthetic (K)
For people who scored high on Kinaesthetic, what they feel is more important than what they see or hear. These people are either very in tune with their feelings or use external touch to guide them - or both! They learn by doing so are less interested in theory and more interested in trying something out. They often love physical activity and making physical things like crafts, woodwork or cooking. Because people with a Kinaesthetic preference rely on their feelings, they take a little bit longer to process information than others because they are checking in with how they ‘feel’ about what’s just been said. Therefore other preferences can perceive them as slow or dithery. Comfort is important and they will get distracted by situations when physical needs are not attended to (hard seats or no natural light).

Auditory Digital (Ad)
People who scored high on this system also need to look at their second preference as that is how they take information in. For people who scored highly on Auditory Digital facts, making sense and logic is more important than how something looks, sounds or feels. They will often talk to themselves a lot as a way of working through things. They like facts, science, processes and they need to understand something before they do it.
Your least preferred System

We will naturally communicate and relate better with people who are similar to us and the Representational Systems are no exception. If you want to relate better with people then you also need to look at where you scored lowest - your least preferred system. People who have a strong preference in your least preferred system are like to be the people who are a mystery to you, annoy you and that you understand least. They are also likely to be the person you are in an intimate relationship with because opposites do attract! Don’t panic, here are our top tips for communicating with people in your least preferred system.

Visual (V)
If your least preferred system is Visual then make an extra effort to prepare for Visual preferred people in meetings, prepare for them something to look at, or a presentation or even a list of bullets you are going to cover. It may seem pointless to you but it will really help them to get it. Listen out for people who use visual words a lot like see, picture, look and use them back to them, this will help them to understand you better. If you are in a relationship with someone with this preference you need to show them you care and love them with something they can see.

Auditory (A)
If your least preferred system is Auditory then make sure you listen carefully to people who like to talk things through. Don’t interrupt them or attempt to summarise using your own words, use phrases like ‘that sounds like’ or ‘I hear you’. Explain ideas and concepts to rather than just sending them things and give them an opportunity to respond verbally if their opinion is important to you (or your career!). If you are in a relationship with someone with this preference they need to hear how you feel about them and will value talking and discussion, for them this is a sign that you care.

Kinaesthetic (K)
If your least preferred system is Kinaesthetic then you need to be aware of the feelings of others and don’t unintentionally ‘hurt’ them. You are likely to disregard feelings as fluffy whereas for them it’s data. People with a Kinaesthetic preference will become very stubborn and blocking if their feelings are hurt, this causes a lot of problems for organisations. If you communicating with them walk them through things if you can, once they get it, they really get it. Use words like ‘get a grasp of’ or ‘get to grips with’ as these are all kinaesthetic words they can process easily. Be patient if they get fidgety and don’t make it mean anything, they are just focused on comfort. If you are in a relationship with someone who has this preference, physical affection will be very important to them and a way of showing how much you care.

Auditory Digital (Ad)
If this is your least preferred system then you are likely to turn off people with this preference by being too vague, wooly and not following process. If you need to communicate with people with this preference (and especially in technical careers there are many), remember to bring your facts, talk about the science and take them through a logical sequence. Don’t disregard details. Use non sensory words like understand, know and make sense and it’s often best to avoid feeling words. If you are in a relationship with someone with this preference you also need to look at how to respond to the second preference and if you are making an important decision together, make sure you check out and present the logic and reason.
Using the Representational Systems

So now you have a sense of these different systems, you can go out and use them to help you be even more successful in your work and life.

- If you are presenting at a meeting, think about whether you have all the different preferences covered.

- Look out for clues as to the preferences of significant people in your life; boss, partner, children, co-workers - so that you can communicate with them in a way that makes sense to them.

- If you are learning something new, can you flex it to your preference. For example Kinaesthetic preferences will hate a lot of e-learning and like to try things out, Visuals like to watch and Auditory preferences like to listen and be able to ask questions. Can you help your children with this too?

- Be less judgemental of others now that you understand how differently we all process our experience. You can now understand why they do the things they do (and they are not just to annoy you - honest!)

Here’s the health warning though, this is just a taster and doesn’t represent all there is to learn about the Representational Systems so be careful of putting people in boxes (Ah - you are a Visual!) or over simplifying people’s personalities based on your new found knowledge. People are more complex than this, as with all psychological tools, these are clues not absolutes.

Want to learn more?

If you want to take your understanding of this powerful concept further then there are a few things you can do next (depending on your learning style!)

Get qualified in NLP. We run a 4 day Diploma in NLP for those who want a good grounding in the concepts and applications and our gold standard NLP Practitioner Certification is for people who want to go into depth and learn how to do change work with individuals and organisations using the tools, models and techniques of NLP. You can find out more about both courses and which once would suit you best here http://www.monkeypuzzletraining.co.uk/nlp-training

If you want to find our more about choosing an NLP training in the UK and how to get good quality training, download our free guide here www.monkeypuzzletraining.co.uk/store

Read more about it. The Magic of NLP DeMystified by Frank Pucelik is, in our opinion one of the best books on Representational Systems. NLP at Work by Sue Knight is also good.