

PLANNERS 101
Choosing a Planner to Match your Individual Style
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Trying to get organized, you have once again purchased a fancy planner. Yet it sits under a pile of papers on your desk, unused. You feel guilty every time you catch a glimpse of that planner, and you kick yourself for not being disciplined enough to use it regularly.

The problem is not you. The problem is your choice of planner. A planner is not a one-size-fits-all purchase. You need to consider your individual learning style and your personal concept of time when choosing your time management tools.

The VARK Guide to Learning Styles, developed by Neil Fleming of Lincoln University, New Zealand, identifies four preferences for processing information---Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic. Although you probably use skills from all four areas, identifying your predominant style will help you choose a planner that works for you.

The Visual Learner---“Seeing is Believing”

If you are a VISUAL learner, you respond to the look of an object. You are interested in color, layout and design. You enjoy things that make good use of color and shapes like food, decorations, festivals, fireworks, and displays. You appreciate fashion sense. If given the choice, you will probably draw something.

You need a planner with lots of color and generous amounts of open space. Use stickers, highlighters and colored ink to add interest to your to-do list and calendar. Symbols, flow charts and mind maps will have more meaning for you than traditional lists, so don't use a planner with preprinted lines and boxes. Consider turning your planner horizontally or diagonally for a different look from the traditional vertical space. But beware---you may find that you spend more time organizing the “look” of your planner than paying attention to what it contains.

A PDA might work for you, but only if it has a large color screen. The device itself should speak to your sense of style---nothing stodgy and gray. Screen icons that are colorful and intuitive will appeal to you.

The Aural Learner---“The Power of Oratory”

If you are an AURAL learner, written words are not as valuable as those you hear. You thrive on discussion groups and conversations with yourself. You have excellent verbal skills. You have a well-defined appreciation for music, and you enjoy “talk” radio and audio books. You will probably go and tell somebody about this article.

A mini-recorder or MP3 player is an effective tool for you. Record your to-do lists and appointments on your player and listen to it often. The alarm function on your watch or cell phone is valuable to keep you on schedule. Use voice mail or the memo feature on your telephone as an auditory scratchpad. If you must rely on written lists and calendars, read the words out loud to help you assimilate the information.

Another alternative if you are an aural learner is to hire a personal assistant. Delegate the record-keeping, scheduling, and list-making to your assistant, and ask for a frequent oral report.

The Read/Write Learner----“The Pen Is Mightier than the Sword”

If you are a READ/WRITE learner, you rely on the written word for information. You like words, especially those with an interesting meaning or background. You appreciate authors and speakers who use challenging words and sentences full of information. You choose books dense with text, and you probably have a stack of them next to your bed. You enjoy Scrabble, crosswords, acronyms, and mnemonics. You are probably heading to the library soon.

A traditional planner is designed for read/write learners like you. Look for pages that have neat, clean lines. Bulleted or numbered lists appeal to your style, so find a planner with pages that have room for your list-making. Any planner that allows for systematic recording of events will meet your needs. Pages printed with random quotes or “thought for the day” will also appeal to you.

A PDA is also an appropriate tool for you. You will probably read the entire book of instructions that accompanies it. Find a PDA that has easily-readable fonts. Test out the keyboard before you buy, as you will be using it frequently.

The Kinesthetic Learner----“Learning from Experience”

If you are a KINESTHETIC learner, you need to do things to understand. You like to use all of your senses. Ideas are only valuable if they sound practical, relevant, and real to you. You take a hands-on approach to life, and you aren’t afraid to use trial and error when meeting a challenge. Talking about real things in your life, doing things with others, making things happen---that is the focus of your life. Your motto is “nothing beats learning by doing.”

You might not want a planner at all, but if you do, choose the style carefully. Look for a planner with richly-textured paper and cover. Find a matching pen that feels comfortable in your hand. Make sure your planner is portable—you will want to be able to walk around with it. As you create your to-do list, use action words to describe your obligations.

If a planner seems too static for you, try manipulatives like index cards or post-it notes for your appointments and to-dos. List one item on each card, and sort them in a card box or binder. A big dry-erase board or chalkboard is another effective tool. Make sure it is large enough to give you room to write with large, flowing letters.

Your Personal Concept of Time

Once you’ve determined your learning style and chosen your planner type, you have another decision to make before you buy. What is your concept of time? Do you like to concentrate on only one day at a time? Find a day planner. Do you prefer to plan for the week or even for the month? Use a planner that gives you plenty of room to record a week or month’s worth of activities. If you have children in school, a calendar that reflects your school year will be the most useful.

Perhaps your concept of time is more creative. Does your schedule stay in rhythm with your pay period or a project deadline? Does your week begin Wednesday instead of Sunday or Monday? Purchase or create a planner that marks time the way you do.

A planner is a tool that should fit your personal style and your concept of time. Choose your planner carefully, and you’ll never find it at the bottom of a heap of papers again.