

Right Brain vs. Left Brain – What’s the Difference?

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The human brain is a complex organ responsible for intelligence, senses, movement, and behavior (National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, 2007, ¶ 1). The halves of the brain—the “right brain” and the “left brain”—perform different functions and communicate information with each other through a band of nerves that connect them. The right side of the brain controls most of the movement and functions of the left side of the body, and the left side of the brain controls most of the movements and functions of the right side of the body.

You may hear that someone is a “right-brained” or “left-brained” individual. This is called “brain dominance,” meaning that an individual has a natural preference for processing information on one side of the brain. The right side is considered the intuitive or spontaneous side, while the left side is logical. Knowing an individual’s brain dominance can help you understand his/her “ways” of thinking, behaving, speaking, and functioning. Also, it can help parents and educators tailor activities to a child’s natural learning preferences.

How Do I Know If Someone Is “Right-Brained?”

Right-brain characteristics include creativity, the ability to see patterns, spatial awareness, and the understanding of how things relate to one another in different contexts. You may find that individuals with this brain dominance are good at recognizing faces, places, and objects (Sousa, 1995, p. 88). These individuals seem to “have a knack for”:

- “Out-of-the-box” thinking
- Art, including the ability to draw, paint, sculpt, etc.
- Imaginative thinking
- Music, including the ability to play instruments with ease or to recognize a song melody and play it back upon “hearing it”



Keep in mind that “right-brained” individuals may exhibit one or several of these traits.

How Do I Know if Someone Is “Left-Brained?”

Left-brain characteristics include a gift for language, analytical skills, and mathematical concepts such as time and sequence. You may find that individuals with this brain dominance are good with letters, numbers, and words (Sousa, 1995, p. 88). These individuals seem to “have a knack for”:

- Language skills including reading, writing, and speaking
- Math
- Logic and reasoning
- Science



Keep in mind that “left-brained” individuals may exhibit one or several of these traits.

How Can Educators Help the “Right-Brained”/“Left-Brained” Student?

You can observe students’ “ways” of thinking, behaving, speaking, and functioning to understand their natural learning preferences. Certain characteristics or abilities from your students may appear to be “right-brained” or “left-brained.” Once you see what those natural strengths and preferences are, you can tailor activities to their learning styles. Keep in mind, though, that using many different teaching techniques can benefit all your students, both “right-” and “left-brained.” It is also important to remember that an individual can exhibit both “right-” and “left-brained” traits.

For many students, particularly those who are “right-brained,” a visual, such as a picture or 3-D model, can help them better understand a concept. Another way to help “right-brained” students is to pair music with learning. Have students make up a song about history facts and sing it to the melody of a familiar song such as “On Top of Old Smoky.” Let these students see, feel, and touch things. “Right-brained” students also seem to thrive when doing group or hands-on activities, such as (Quantum Learning, 1999, p. 31):



- Shared learning
- Group discussions
- Role-play/simulations
- Experiments

To help “left-brained” students, provide information in very logical sequences—for example, make (numbered) lists for them. Another way to help students with a left-brain preference is to give them typed or printed directions. Let these students do their work step by step. “Left-brained” students seem to thrive when following plans and having structure with activities, such as (Quantum Learning, 1999, p. 31):



- Analysis
- Research
- Realistic projects
- Worksheets



Resources

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (2007). *Brain basics: Know your brain*. Retrieved January 19, 2009, from http://ninds.nih.gov/disorders/brain_basics/know_your_brain.htm?css=print

Quantum Learning (1999). *Orchestrating student success*. Oceanside, CA: Quantum Learning Network.

Sousa, D. R. (1995). *How the brain learns*. Reston, VA: NASSP.



Helpful Products

The list of Super Duper® products below may be helpful when working with children who have special needs. Visit www.superduperinc.com or call 1-800-277-8737. Click the links below to see the product description.

Interactive Sing-Along Big Books – Set 1

Ask for Item #TPX-18409 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=TPX18409>

Webber® Hear It! Say It! Learn It!™

Ask for Item #BKCD-407 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=BKCD407>

Yogarilla™

Ask for Item #OTSC-8609 <http://www.superduperinc.com/products/view.aspx?pid=OTSC8609>