E&L Cognitive Style Definitions

Synoptic processing refers to the tendency to perceive phenomena as wholes. Synoptic learners usually start with the big picture, pay attention to contextual cues, and rely on their intuition when processing information.

Ectenic processing refers to the tendency to perceive phenomena as composites. Ectenic learners often start by looking at the disparate pieces of information, apply conscious control over their learning, and tend to prefer a step-by-step approach to the way information is presented.

The difference in processing (intuitive learning vs. consciously controlled learning) may account, in part, for the observed tendency of synoptics to appear impulsive, while the ectenics appear reflective.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **SYNOPTIC PROCESSING** | **ECTENIC PROCESSING** |
| ***Field Sensitivity*** as learning style prefers to address material as part of context and often picks up material by ‘osmosis.’ It relates to wholes that cannot bedisassembled. It can be compared to illumination by floodlight that shows the whole scene. | ***Field Insensitivity*** makes little or no use of the whole context and often excludes incidental learning. Responds best to material that is ‘out there in black and white.’ |
| ***Field Independence*** as learning style: prefers to separate material from context and finds what is most important. It can be compared to a spotlight thatfocuses sharply on one thing. | ***Field Dependence*** relies on context and does not select out what is important for focus. May prefer to have what is most important pointed out. |
| ***Random*** (non-linear) processing follows an internally developed order of processing. | ***Sequential*** (linear) processing follows an externally provided order of processing. |
| ***Global*** processing attends to gestalts and the “big picture”; is aware of ‘forests’ (vs. trees); oriented toward processing from the ‘top down.’ | ***Local*** processing attends to discrete items and details; is aware of ‘trees’ (vs. forests); oriented towards processing from ‘bottom up.’ |
| ***Inductive*** processing goes from the specific to the general, generalizes from experience. | ***Deductive*** processing goes from the general to the specific, applies generalizations to experience. |
| ***Synthesis*** comprehends through assembly of components into a constructed whole. | ***Analysis*** comprehends through disassembly into components. |
| ***Analogue*** processing is a qualitative or metaphoric approach to interpreting experience; makes frequentuse of associations. | ***Digital*** processing is a quantitative/literal approach to interpreting experience; tends to take things at face value. |
| ***Concrete*** (experiential) processing interacts with the world directly; learns through application ofknowledge, often at the physical level. | ***Abstract*** (theoretical) processing: interacts with the world through cognitive constructs; learns from formal renditionof knowledge. |
| ***Leveling*** looks for similarities; often does not notice disparities and may seek to reduce them; tends not tonotice articulations within composites. | ***Sharpening*** notices disparities and seeks to explore and account for them; tends to be aware of componentialstructure. |
| ***Impulsivity*** reacts quickly in acting or speaking withlittle or no conscious ‘thinking it through’ before acting (or speaking); acts on ‘gut’; thought may follow action. | ***Reflectivity*** ‘thinks something through’ before taking action (or speaking); often does not trust ‘gut reaction;’ action usually follows thought. |

*E&L is a product of Dr. Madeline Ehrman & Dr. Betty Lou Leaver, copyrighted 2002. Chart by the Learning Consultation Service at the Foreign Service Institute, April 2017.*