

ORALITY ASSESSMENT TOOL

By Lynne L. Abney (from Walter Ong, *Orality & Literacy*) / Each set of statements, left and right, describes the ends of 40 communication style "poles". Choose a person you know well. Thinking specifically about that person, circle the number that best represents his or her behavior in each learning situation. (Example: For #1, if you were evaluating yourself and "have to see the word written down to remember it", you would circle 3 or 4.) Follow the directions to score. The result helps you know how to communicate truth most clearly to a listener with that learning preference.

Basic learning preferences:

My friend's name is: _____

	ORAL COMMUNICATORS	scale		PRINT COMMUNICATORS
		Most Oral	Most Print	
1	learn by hearing ("I'm an aural learner.")	0	1 2 3 4	learn by seeing ("I'm a visual learner.")
2	learn by observing and imitating, by listening and repeating, by memorizing proverbs, traditional sayings, stories, songs, and expressions.	0	1 2 3 4	learn by reading non-fiction, by studying, examining, classifying, comparing, analyzing.
3	think and talk about events, not words. (Words function to paint action pictures.)	0	1 2 3 4	think and talk about words, concepts, and principles. (Words are perceived as representing objects more than actions.)
4	use stories of human action to store, organize, and communicate much of what they know"; information is "embedded in the flow of time" usually on a "story line".	0	1 2 3 4	manage knowledge "in elaborate, more or less scientifically abstract categories", and store it in print rather than in stories.
5	value and learn information handed down from the past.	0	1 2 3 4	seek to discover new information.
6	value traditional solutions.	0	1 2 3 4	value innovative solutions.
SUBTOTAL 1				BASIC LEARNING

Importance of sound:

	ORAL COMMUNICATORS	scale		PRINT COMMUNICATORS
		Most Oral	Most Print	
7	are deeply affected by the sound of what they hear.	0	1 2 3 4	are affected by the content of what they read.
8	prize clarity and style of speech.	0	1 2 3 4	prize clarity and validity of reasoning.
9	view speech primarily as a way of relating to people, or as a form of entertainment.	0	1 2 3 4	view speech primarily as a means of conveying information.
10	respond to a speaker while he is speaking and participate in the story telling.	0	1 2 3 4	generally read or listen quietly.
11	engage in verbal contests, trying to excel in praise, insults, riddles, jokes, etc.	0	1 2 3 4	engage in few verbal contests, but write letters to the editor, etc.
12	believe that oral exchange should normally be formal, carefully articulated.	0	1 2 3 4	believe that oral exchange should normally be informal, casual.
13	can produce, in some cases, beautiful verbal art forms, such as poetry and ballads.	0	1 2 3 4	can produce, in some cases, interesting literature, but generally not verbal art forms of a high quality.
14	view a written text as a record of something spoken or an aid to memorization or recitation.	0	1 2 3 4	view a written text as a vessel of information.
15	prefer to read aloud or at least imagine the sounds of the words as they read.	0	1 2 3 4	prefer to read alone, taking in the content of the words but not their sound.
SUBTOTAL 2				SOUND

Importance of real-life experience:

	ORAL COMMUNICATORS	scale		PRINT COMMUNICATORS
		Most Oral	Most Print	
16	learn and retain knowledge in relation to real or imagined events in human life.	0	1 2 3 4	learn and retain knowledge as general principles, with events as examples.
17	may recite genealogies but make few lists.	0	1 2 3 4	make lists but recite few genealogies.
18	relate closely and personally to the people and events they know about.	0	1 2 3 4	relate more objectively to what they know, because writing comes between them.
19	think and talk mostly about events and people.	0	1 2 3 4	think and write about their own feelings and thoughts as well.
20	reason from experience and association.	0	1 2 3 4	reason by means of "formal" logic, using analysis and explanation.
21	organize non-narrative speeches (such as exhortations and sermons) largely by recounting events associated with the point being made or with the words being used.	0	1 2 3 4	organize non-narrative speeches (such as exhortations and sermons) by laying out a logical progression of thoughts.
SUBTOTAL 3				REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCE

Style preference:

	ORAL COMMUNICATORS	scale		PRINT COMMUNICATORS
		Most Oral	Most Print	
22	communicate by joining sentences with conjunctions such as 'and', 'then'.	0	1 2 3 4	communicate by joining sentences with subjunctives such as 'while', 'after'.
23	can organize experiences and episodes.	0	1 2 3 4	can organize long, logical arguments.
24	construct longer narratives by stringing episodes together; themes may be repeated in several episodes.	0	1 2 3 4	construct narratives with chronologically linear plots that reach a climax and resolution; any themes are validated by the outcome.
25	use symbols and stories to carry the message.	0	1 2 3 4	use charts, diagrams, and lists to explain the message.
26	frequently use words in set phrases, such as sayings, proverbs, riddles, formulas, or just descriptions such as 'brave soldier'.	0	1 2 3 4	generally use words independently, with few set phrases.
27	appreciate repetition, in case something was missed the first time.	0	1 2 3 4	do not like repetition, since material missed can be read again.
28	like verbosity (many words to say a little)	0	1 2 3 4	like brevity (few words to say much)
SUBTOTAL 4				STYLE

Importance of dialogue:

	ORAL COMMUNICATORS	scale		PRINT COMMUNICATORS
		Most Oral	Most Print	
29	tend to communicate in groups.	0	1 2 3 4	tend to communicate one-to-one.
30	learn mostly in interaction with other people.	0	1 2 3 4	learn mostly alone.
31	cannot think about something very long without dialogue.	0	1 2 3 4	can think about something for a long time while making notes about it, etc.
SUBTOTAL 5				DIALOGUE

Importance of drama and melodrama:

	ORAL COMMUNICATORS	scale		PRINT COMMUNICATORS			
		Most Oral	Most Print				
32	employ exaggerated praise and scorn.	0	1	2	3	4	intentionally moderate their praise and scorn.
33	drawn "heavy" characters in their stories.	0	1	2	3	4	prefer realistic characters in stories.
34	create art forms that emphasize struggle against an enemy.	0	1	2	3	4	create art forms that emphasize struggle to reach a goal or overcome an obstacle.
35	use their hands to help express themselves when they tell stories, through gestures or by playing musical instruments.	0	1	2	3	4	use their hands little, since gestures are not written or read.
SUBTOTAL 6							DRAMA AND MELODRAMA

Importance of context:

	ORAL COMMUNICATORS	scale		PRINT COMMUNICATORS			
		Most Oral	Most Print				
36	view matters in the totality of their context, including everyone involved (holistically)	0	1	2	3	4	view matters abstractly and analytically (compartmentally).
37	leave much of the message un verbalized, depending instead on shared situation, shared culture, intonation, facial gestures, and hand gestures to help communicate the message.	0	1	2	3	4	clarify the message by using words rather than context, gesture, or intonation which cannot be conveyed in print.
38	can be imprecise, and clarify as needed, based on the listener's reaction.	0	1	2	3	4	learn to avoid ambiguity because it cannot be clarified by an author at a distance.
39	avoid asking or answering "direct" questions.	0	1	2	3	4	ask and answer "direct" questions.
40	are uninterested in definitions since the context renders them superfluous.	0	1	2	3	4	appreciate definitions.
SUBTOTAL 7							CONTEXT

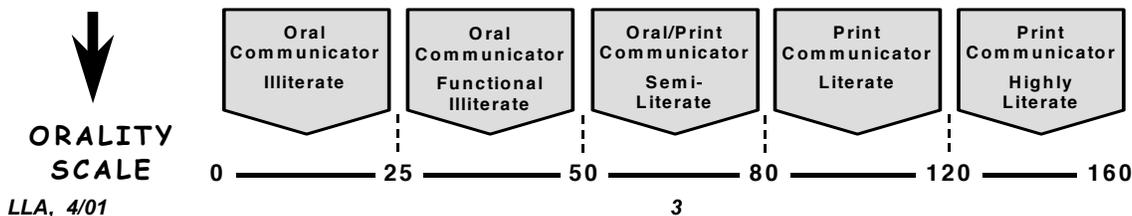
Add the circled numbers in each set of choices. Write the subtotals below and add them together. **Be sure you answered all the questions, even if you had to guess or didn't really know.**

- SUBTOTAL 1 _____ BASIC LEARNING
- SUBTOTAL 2 _____ SOUND
- SUBTOTAL 3 _____ LIFE EXPERIENCE
- SUBTOTAL 4 _____ STYLE
- SUBTOTAL 5 _____ DIALOGUE
- SUBTOTAL 6 _____ DRAMA AND MELODRAMA
- SUBTOTAL 7 _____ CONTEXT

TOTAL _____ 

LOCATE THIS SCORE ON THE
ORALITY SCALE BELOW

Did you find a lot of questions you didn't know the answer to? If so, this indicates that you (like many others) have not yet focused closely on the issue of learning preference.



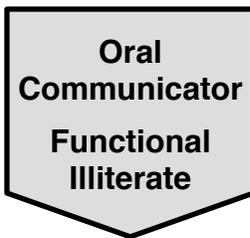
FIVE LEARNING STYLES

ILLITERATE:



- Cannot read or write
- Has never "seen" a word
- Words have no exact meaning
- Words are bits of sounds pictures, not objects
- **ORAL COMMUNICATOR**
- **THE STORY IS THEIR DOMINANT COMMUNICATION STYLE.**

FUNCTIONAL ILLITERATE: AHMED'S STORY



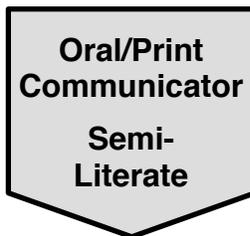
Ahmed is 26 years old. He attended the village school for seven years until his family moved to the city when he was 13. Instead of returning to school, Ahmed dropped out to join his older brothers working at a construction site. He can read everything he needs to read signs and advertisements and the local newspaper.

Ahmed thinks of himself as being aware of what is going on in his neighborhood and the world. He has political opinions and even votes in elections. Ahmed's opinions are shaped by radio, TV, and endless discussions in a neighborhood coffee shop. Printed information has very little effect on his values or his behavior. Yet every country in

the world considers Ahmed to be literate.

As a functional illiterate, Ahmed is an oral communicator. His life is based on what he learns through stories, anecdotes, proverbs, and songs.

SEMI-LITERATE: NUUR'S STORY



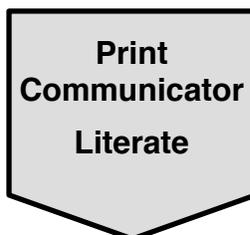
Nuur is 23. When she finished secondary school, her father's connections got her a receptionist job in a manufacturing company. Her girlfriend began showing her how to use the computer to type letters and Nuur was recently promoted to a secretarial position.

But when she has a problem with the computer, she asks her friend. If her friend can't solve it, she asks her boss and he shows her what to do. No one consults a manual there isn't even one in the office. They all learned their computer skills by apprenticeship, not by reading instructions.

Nuur probably lacks the ability (or the patience) to learn new computer skills by reading a manual if there were one. The only books in her home are textbooks and a Qur'an. When she buys something to read, it is usually a glossy magazine with articles about film stars and other "famous" people.

As a semi-literate, Nuur prefers oral communication to print communication. She learns best and most easily through stories, anecdotes, and apprenticeship.

LITERATE (OR FUNCTIONAL LITERATE):

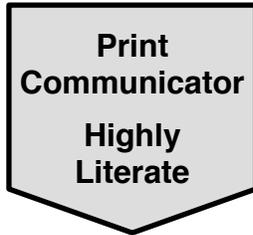


- Continued to use reading and writing beyond 10th grade
- Can summarize what they read or heard and list important points
- Does not depend on number of years of schooling
- **Comfortable with information presented in literate format**
- **Learns and handles concepts, precepts, and principles presented in this manner**
- **STILL RETAINS APPRECIATION FOR ORAL COMMUNICATION AND RESPONDS TO IT WITH UNDERSTANDING**

THE PRICE FOR LITERACY:

- The person has given up many of his or her purely oral communication learning skills.
- Memory is less dependent on recalling oral material and more dependent on recorded notes, books, and other print sources of information.

HIGHLY LITERATE:

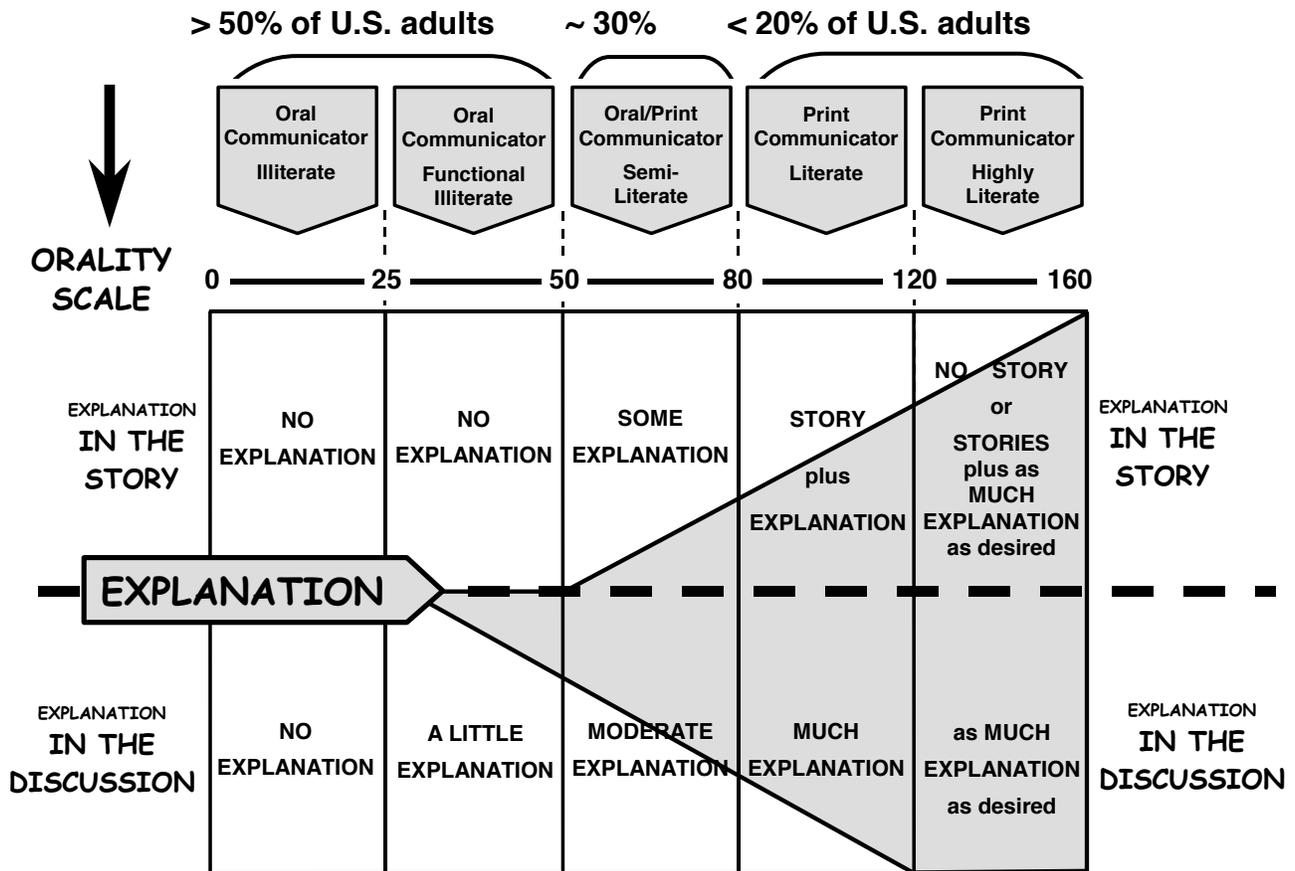


- Spends much time daily developing and using reading and writing skills
- Has usually attended college
- Are often professionals in liberal arts fields
- **Has surrendered oral communication skills**
- **THOROUGHLY WORD-CULTURE PEOPLE, LITERATE COMMUNICATOR**
 - **STILL RETAINS APPRECIATION FOR ORAL COMMUNICATION AND RESPONDS TO IT WITH UNDERSTANDING**

Illiterates, functional illiterates, and semi-literates can learn as well as literate persons *as long as the information is formatted correctly*. This means vehicles such as *stories, parables, poems, songs, and drama*. *What they do not understand or recall is information formatted in lists, tables, outlines, diagrams, steps, or abstract principles.*

NOW MARK YOUR SCORE AGAIN ON THE ORALITY SCALE BELOW ON PAGE 6

LEARNING STYLES AND THE USE OF EXPLANATION



- 1) On the **ORALITY SCALE** above, locate your total score from the Orality Assessment Tool to decide which of these vertical categories best represents your target audience. The stories from the previous pages may help you assess the accuracy of your particular score.
- 2) The gray area indicates the degree to which explanation (exposition, "logical" reasoning) and topical presentations **help** the individual or group understand the message you are communicating.
- 3) Generally speaking, **illiterates, functional illiterates, and semi-literates learn best when information is presented in story form** and explanation is minimized or avoided altogether.
- 4) Notice that explanation is more effective in the **discussion following** your message (when you discern what they actually understood) than in the message itself.

Use this tool as you prepare to interact with each new group and you will soon learn to package your message in a format that is appreciated, understood, and **reproducible** by your target audiences.