

CHAPTER

1

What factors affect  
the learning process?

**Preview**

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Most people have had the experience of trying to learn something and not “getting it.” Similarly, you probably have seen this reaction in friends, classmates, and students. The following description of one student illustrates the challenge most of us have experienced at one time or another as learners.

*Louis is failing his physical education (PE) class. The students have been learning how to play soccer this term, and he has been having a lot of difficulty. The game doesn't make sense to him. It seems like all of the players just run up and down the field. Louis can't understand how to work with his teammates and has trouble with game strategy. He would much prefer to just run laps around the track, where he can show that he has good stamina and does well in races. The PE coach has tried to help Louis get some basic soccer skills and a sense of game strategy but is about ready to give up. He just can't find a way to help Louis understand the basic principles and skills of this game.*

*Outside of sports, the situation for Louis is much different. He enjoys playing the trumpet and is an important member of the orchestra. Obviously, Louis has certain talents that emerge in music but not in soccer.*

This chapter explores the process of learning and factors that affect how individual students learn. By first examining these factors, teachers can imagine more options as they design lessons and activities.



## Experience: Reflection on Learning

One of the underlying principles of this book is that all learning, regardless of content, is similar. In this section, we explore some of the factors that help people learn in general, and also look at factors that affect how individual students learn.

### Using Concrete Details to Describe Experiences

When reflecting on a learning experience, it is critical to describe exactly what happened so that you identify the factors that affected your learning. What exactly did you do? What were the other students and the teacher doing? Where did this happen? How long did it take? What was happening around you at this time? In this way, you will have evidence to support your decisions about how to help learning happen.

### The Help and Hinder Concept

These questions are critical in guiding our reflective practice as teachers and learners. Once we can identify what helps or hinders an individual student's learning, we can then make informed decisions and create action plans.

## Framing the Task

Write for a few minutes about an experience you had learning a skill.

**Example** When I was \_\_\_\_\_, I learned how to \_\_\_\_\_.”

Choose a non-language learning experience such as one of the following choices:

- driving
- riding a bicycle
- using a computer
- swimming

Write at least ten steps that happened as you were learning. Be sure to describe exactly what happened and what you did or felt.

Look back on each learning step and consider how you felt and how that feeling might have affected your learning. What helped you learn? What hindered your learning? What had little effect on your learning?

**Example** When I was six years old, I learned how to balance on a bicycle by myself and ride a hundred meters straight without turning.

What happened?	How did you feel?	How did it affect your learning? Did it help? Hinder? Neither?
<i>My dad held onto the back of the bike and ran behind me as I rode around the block.</i>	<i>I was uncomfortable because of the pressure to ride. I felt scared at the idea of him letting go. I had fun because I was moving on the bike.</i>	<i>I got used to the feel of the bike and what riding it would be like. I wasn't able to figure out how to balance on my own.</i>
<i>Dad got frustrated because I still couldn't ride after several days.</i>	<i>I felt bad because I didn't want to waste his time, but nervous about falling down.</i>	<i>It made me want to escape, either by giving up or learning it another way.</i>
<i>I decided to practice on my own.</i>	<i>Excited!</i>	<i>It helped me by putting me in control and making me think about what I needed to do to learn.</i>
<i>I took the bike to the top of my driveway, which had a slight incline.</i>		
<i>I got on the bicycle and sat on it with my tiptoes touching the ground.</i>		
<i>I lifted my toes off the ground, let myself roll a little bit, and then put my feet down.</i>		
<i>I did this several times 'til I was at the bottom of the driveway.</i>		
<i>I took the bike back up the driveway and did it over and over, each time going further before putting my feet on the ground.</i>		
<i>I began putting my feet on the pedals after I lifted them off the ground.</i>		
<i>I took the bike to the front of the house, where it was flat, and began pushing myself with my feet, putting my feet on the pedals, and then pedaling a bit.</i>		