

Using 4MAT in Law School

Applying 4MAT principles, law students who have Quadrant One, Three, or Four learning styles can succeed in a Quadrant Two environment.

In my work as an associate law professor, I have found learning styles research to be extremely useful. It has helped me understand and improve my classroom teaching and has provided me with a framework to understand the entire teaching process. It has even helped me grow in my personal and professional relationships.

In my life "before learning styles," I was quite confident that I grasped the basics of the teaching-learning process. I had pursued an undergraduate degree in education, excelled academically, tutored, and worked as a student teacher, all without any feeling of inadequacy.

The first jolt to my confidence occurred during my first week of law school. Suddenly I realized that my professors' teaching methods were definitely not compatible with my learning style. Unfortunately, I had no theory to help me understand why there was a mismatch or what I could do to correct it. All I knew was that my many years of experience as a learner and my four years of education courses were of no assistance to me in solving this dilemma. I vowed that, if I survived law school, I would learn even more about teaching so that I could improve the way law classes were taught.

Eight years later, after earning my law degree and a Ph.D. in education, I was hired to teach at Loyola University School of Law. But as I prepared to teach my first class, I realized that I still had only the vaguest notions about what I should actually be *doing* in the classroom to facilitate learning for students with different learning styles. It was then that my friend Bernice McCarthy showed me a draft of what would even-

tually become her 4MAT model. I immediately recognized that 4MAT was what I had been searching for: a model to help me understand the different ways people learn and to provide a method to design curriculum.

With a flash of insight, I suddenly realized that my law professors had almost always approached teaching from a Quadrant Two perspective, while I learned most comfortably in a Quadrant Four mode. I also recognized how that narrow focus had harmed *all* students in my law classes. Most of our law school careers were spent reflecting on abstract legal principles, and we were never given the opportunity to "complete the cycle" and use our knowledge to solve concrete, real-world problems.

Since learning the 4MAT principles, I have used them to structure what and how I teach. At the beginning of my Professional Responsibility course, for example, I now require my students to ask nonlawyers to define a good law-

yer, and then to reflect on the attitudes and values underlying those responses. I also give them a list of questions that practicing lawyers have posed in calls to the American Bar Association Ethics Hotline and ask the students to conduct the research to answer these questions. I involve students in such Quadrant Four activities as drafting proposed language for a student code of ethics at the law school. As in a traditional course, students learn about the ethical standards for our profession, but they also get the opportunity to examine underlying values and to apply these concepts to solve real ethical dilemmas.

The 4MAT model has also helped me counsel students. It has been my experience that law students with Quadrant One learning preferences are the most frustrated during their first year of law school. They are also the most likely to drop out. By sharing information about learning styles with these students, I have helped them understand why law school is so uncomfortable for them. More important, I now have a tool to help them cope. Quadrant One learners, for example, can usually be assisted by the counseling process itself. It allows them to clarify their own reasons for wanting to be lawyers and allows me to direct them toward readings in jurisprudence that address the particular philosophical questions they consider so important. I also encourage them to form study groups with students who have different learning styles, so they can learn new perspectives.

Overall, 4MAT has been an incredibly useful tool. It has helped me understand and communicate with others in every aspect of my life,

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including my spouse, my colleagues, and my friends. I have used it to teach doctors how to educate their patients more effectively, to teach lawyers how to relate more easily to clients, and to help parents better understand their children.

In short, the simplicity of 4MAT is deceiving. Its simplicity is actually evi-

dence of its elegance and universal applicability. In essence, 4MAT is a metaphor for the process of learning itself; the movement from concrete and experiential learning, to abstract and objective thought, to practical application of theory, and, finally, to the development of new theory based on an individual's own life experiences.

As Piaget explained, "to understand is to invent." 4MAT gives us a method for the process of invention. And that makes 4MAT a very good invention in itself. □

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PATRICIA WEBER AND FRED WEBER

Using 4MAT to Improve Student Presentations

Student presentations went from ho-hum to appealing when their teachers showed them how to use a 4MAT wheel to plan their oral reports.

For more than two months, Megan had worked studiously on her independent study project, gathering information from a multitude of resources, writing an outline, making a mind-map of the facts she discovered, and writing her findings in a written report. She couldn't wait to share her report with the other students in her gifted class, because she knew they were usually captivated by new, interesting ideas.

At last, the day came when Megan stood before the class, ready to share her neatly typed and bound report. As she began to read, however, her teacher saw the looks of intense interest on the faces of Megan's classmates fade into glazed stares as Megan droned on and the silence in the room grew. When she finished, her classmates asked only a few questions and offered scant praise for her superior piece of work.

Talking things over later with her teacher, Megan truly could not understand how her friends could *not* have been interested in the fascinating data she had presented to them. Why

hadn't they been dazzled? Why hadn't they shared her enthusiasm? Why hadn't they even listened?

The teacher felt sad for Megan, knowing that instead of carrying away from this project the joy of learning and the delight of accomplishment, Megan would be left with a sense of failure. She had expended extraordinary effort for a small reward—a superior grade, something she was accustomed to receiving as a matter of

course. She would have much preferred her classmates' praise. And the other students had missed an excellent opportunity to share in Megan's enthusiasm for her topic and to learn something new about a deeply engaging subject.

An Entirely Different Scenario

Try to imagine the exact opposite of Megan's unhappy scenario. Working as long and as hard as Megan, Nancy had researched the subject of extrasensory perception (ESP). However, when she came to the front of the classroom on the day of her presentation, instead of starting to read from her paper, she burst in to song!

Every head in the room looked up. Students kept their eyes glued to Nancy and strained their ears to capture her words. Everyone was eager to see what she'd do next, and she didn't fail to surprise them. Throughout her presentation, Nancy kept each student engaged, involved, and participating. When she finished, the group applauded heartily. All day, her classmates continued to tell her how much they

Borrowing the melodies of Bach, Beethoven, and Mozart from her piano lesson book, Nancy was *singing* the basic facts about her topic.

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