NEURO-LINGUISTIC PROGRAMMING · A VISUAL SUMMARY

Representational Systems

VAKOG

How we see, hear, feel, smell and taste our inner world — and how to use that knowledge to communicate, learn and change.



Covers: the five systems · sensory predicates · eye accessing cues · lead, primary & reference systems · self-assessment · rapport, pacing & leading · submodalities · strategies · applications · evidence & criticism · exercises

OVERVIEW

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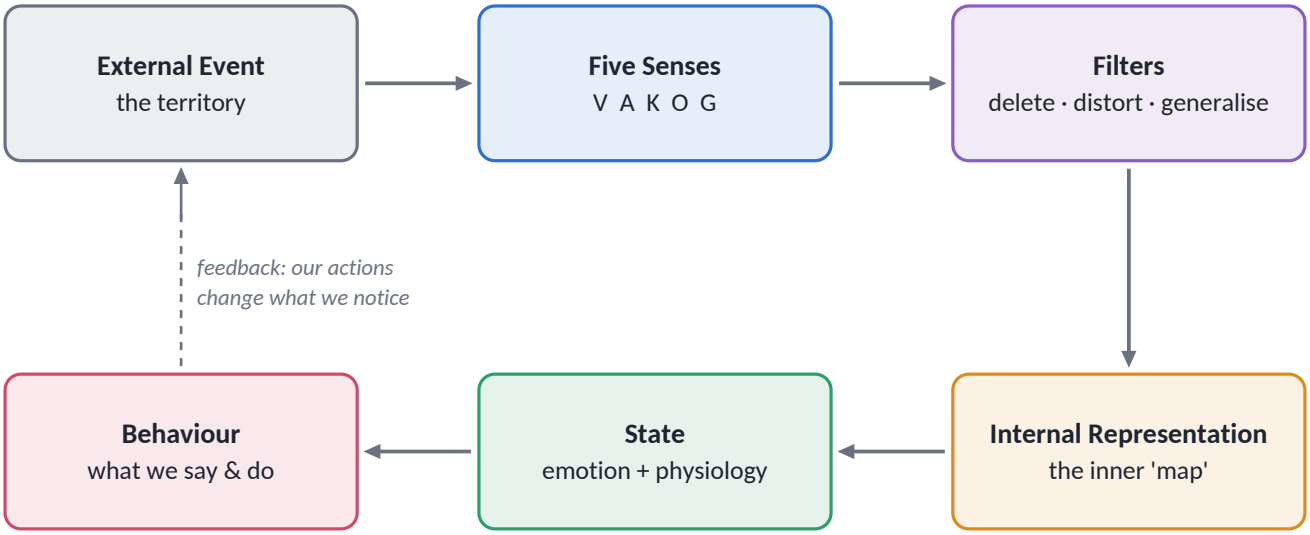
SECTION 01

What Are Representational Systems?

In Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), **representational systems** — often shortened to **rep systems** — are the sensory channels the mind uses to take in, store, and re-create experience. When you remember last summer, plan tomorrow, or worry about a meeting, you do it by making internal *pictures*, *sounds*, *feelings*, and sometimes *smells* and *tastes*.

NLP groups these into five systems, remembered by the acronym **VAKOG**: Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic, Olfactory and Gustatory. A sixth mode, **Auditory digital (Ad)**, describes the inner voice of words and logic. The core idea is simple: we never respond to the world directly, but to our internal *re-presentation* of it.

From the world to behaviour: the NLP communication model



Key principle

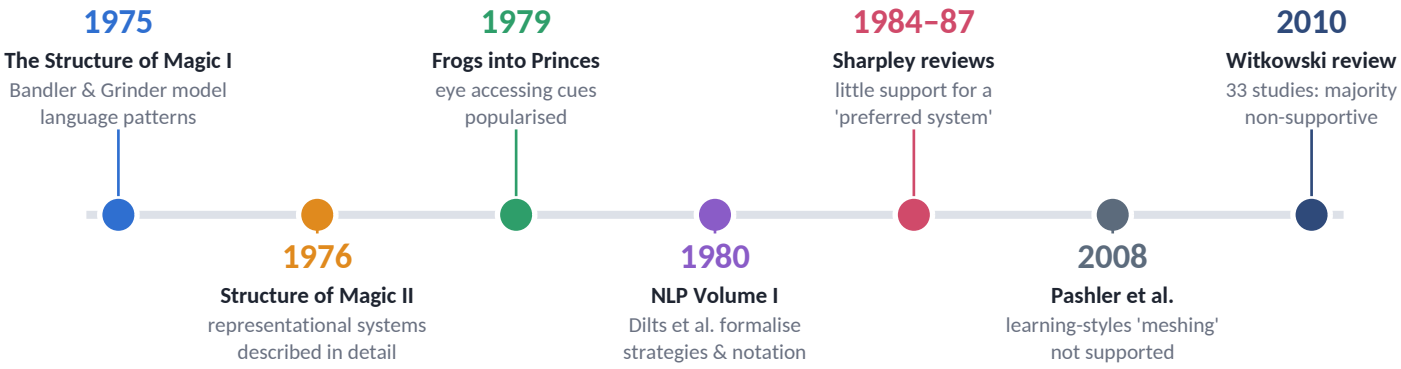
"The map is not the territory." The phrase, borrowed by NLP from Alfred Korzybski, captures the whole idea: each person builds a different sensory map of the same event, and that map — not the event — drives how they feel and act.

SECTION 02

Origins & History

Representational systems were introduced by **Richard Bandler** and **John Grinder** in the 1970s while modelling skilled therapists such as Virginia Satir, Milton Erickson and Fritz Perls. They noticed that clients' word choice seemed to reveal *how* they were thinking — one would say “I see the problem,” another “It doesn't sound right,” a third “I can't get a grip on it.”

Matching a client's sensory language appeared to deepen rapport, and the idea became a cornerstone of NLP training. Over the following decades researchers began to test the claims, with mixed and often negative results (see Section 24).



Influence	Contribution to the rep-system idea
Virginia Satir	Family therapist whose sensory-rich language Bandler & Grinder modelled
Milton Erickson	Hypnotherapist; skilled at matching and leading a client's experience
Alfred Korzybski	General semantics — “the map is not the territory”
Robert Dilts	Formalised strategies and rep-system notation (NLP Vol. I, 1980)

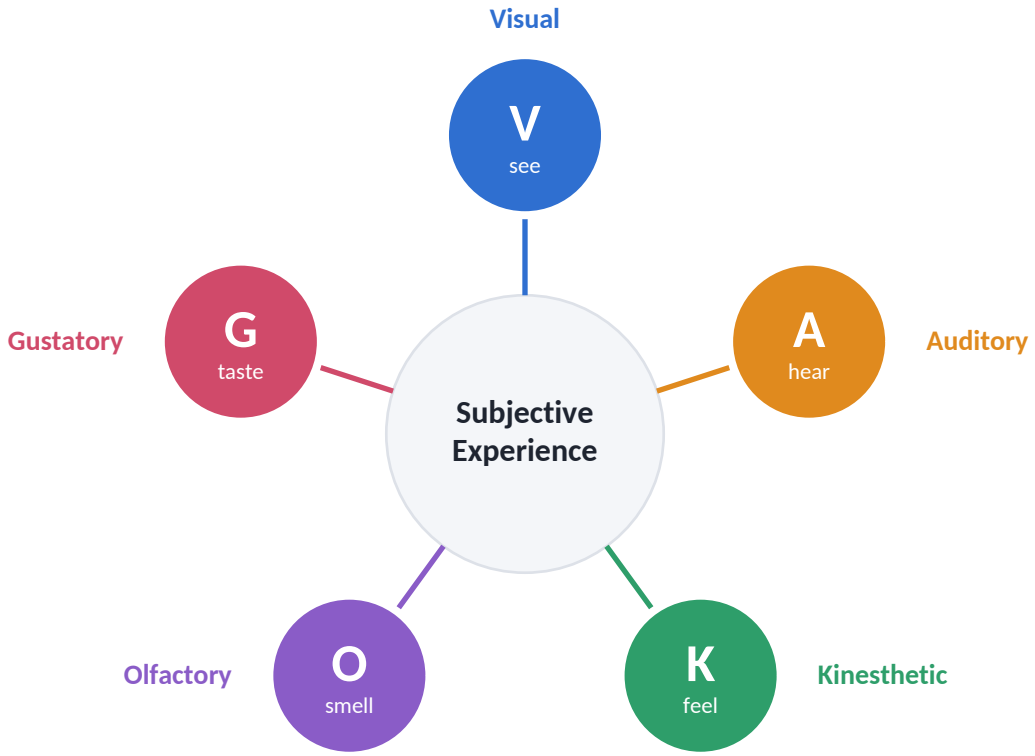
Why the idea spread so quickly

- It is **easy to observe**: anyone can learn to listen for sensory words.
- It offers a **simple rule** for rapport — match the other person's language.
- It fits everyday experience: most people recognise themselves as 'more visual' or 'more of a feeler'.
- It spread through **workshops** in business, coaching and education.

SECTION 03

The VAKOG Model at a Glance

Every experience is coded through the five senses. Most people use all of them all the time, but NLP suggests that many people *favour* one or two — especially when they are stressed or learning something new.

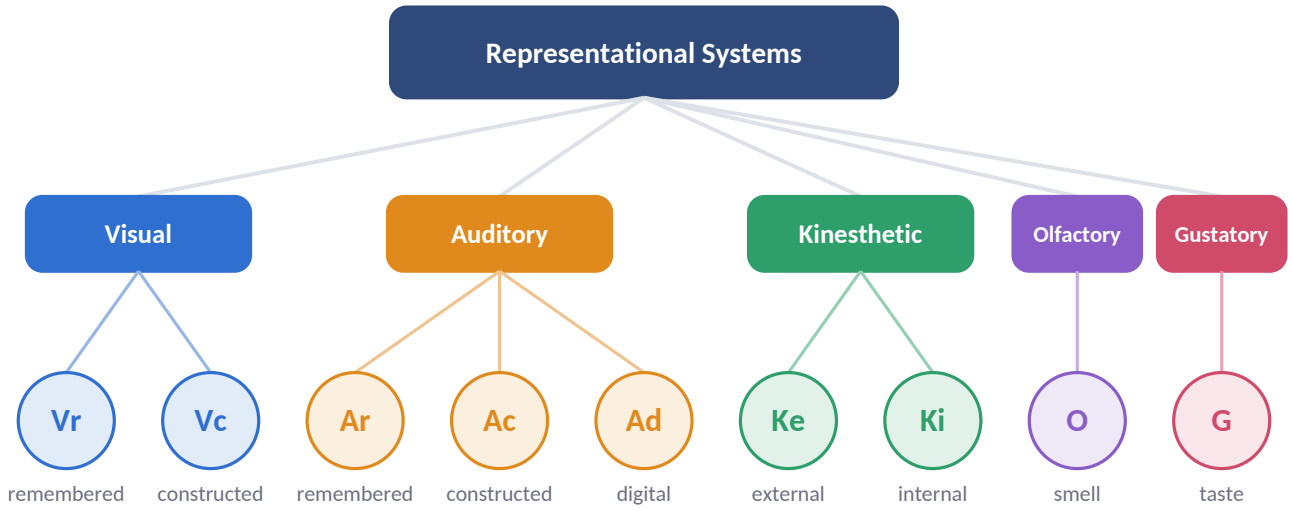


System	Sense	Internal experience	Typical language
V — Visual	Sight	Pictures, images, colours, movies	“I see”, “looks good”, “clear”
A — Auditory	Hearing	Sounds, tones, voices, music	“sounds right”, “I hear you”
K — Kinesthetic	Touch & feeling	Sensations, emotions, movement	“feels right”, “get a grip”
O — Olfactory	Smell	Scents, odours	“smells fishy”, “fresh idea”
G — Gustatory	Taste	Flavours	“bitter pill”, “sweet deal”
Ad — Auditory digital	Inner words	Self-talk, logic, lists	“makes sense”, “I think”

SECTION 04

Sub-Systems: Remembered, Constructed & More

NLP subdivides most systems according to whether an experience is **remembered** (recalled from the past) or **constructed** (imagined or created). Kinesthetic experience is split into **external** touch and **internal** feelings and emotions. This finer notation is used for eye accessing cues and for writing out mental strategies.



Code	Meaning	Example prompt that tends to evoke it
Vr	Visual remembered	"What colour was your first bicycle?"
Vc	Visual constructed	"Imagine a purple elephant with yellow spots."
Ar	Auditory remembered	"Recall the sound of your doorbell."
Ac	Auditory constructed	"Imagine your voice sounding like a cartoon character."
Ad	Auditory digital	"Recite the alphabet backwards in your head."
Ke	Kinesthetic external	"Notice the texture of the chair beneath you."
Ki	Kinesthetic internal	"Remember how it feels to be truly relaxed."
O / G	Olfactory / Gustatory	"Recall the smell of fresh coffee … the taste of lemon."

The superscript notation in older texts (e.g. V^{r}, A^{d}) means the same thing; modern summaries usually write the letters inline.

SECTION 05

The Visual System (V)

Visually oriented people tend to think in pictures. They may talk quickly because images arrive faster than words, care about how things *look*, and remember faces better than names. In NLP descriptions they often sit or stand upright with their eyes moving upward as they think.

Vr
recalls images:
faces, places, layouts

Vc
imagines new images:
plans, designs, futures

Eyes ↑
glance upward or
defocus when thinking

Feature	Typical tendency (as described in NLP literature)
Posture	Upright, head and shoulders raised, may lean back
Breathing	High in the chest, relatively shallow
Voice	Faster tempo, higher pitch, bursts of words
Gestures	Points, draws shapes in the air, gestures at eye level
Memory	Remembers what was seen; may forget spoken instructions
Learning	Diagrams, charts, demonstrations, colour-coded notes
Values	Appearance, tidiness, the 'big picture'
Under stress	Mental images race; may feel overwhelmed by too many pictures

Communication tip

Visual processors often want to *see* the plan before agreeing. A one-page sketch or mock-up can persuade them faster than a long explanation.

Visual Predicates & Phrases

Predicates are the process words — verbs, adverbs and adjectives — that presuppose a sensory system. Listening for them is the main way NLP practitioners infer how someone is thinking right now.

see	look	view	picture	focus
clear	bright	vivid	colourful	image
glimpse	reveal	illuminate	observe	watch
imagine	show	hazy	foggy	perspective

Visual phrase	Meaning in plain words
"I see what you mean."	I understand.
"Let's look at this from another angle."	Let's reconsider.
"The future looks bright."	I'm optimistic.
"It's a bit hazy / fuzzy to me."	I'm unsure; I don't understand yet.
"Show me how it works."	Explain / demonstrate it.
"In light of ..."	Given / considering ...
"That's a colourful character."	That person is unusual or lively.
"I get the picture."	I've understood the situation.
"See you later."	Goodbye (the predicate is habitual, not significant).

> **Caution**
>
> One predicate means little. Look for **patterns** across several minutes of conversation, and ignore fixed expressions such as "see you later".

SECTION 06

The Auditory System (A)

Auditory thinkers attend closely to sound: tone of voice, rhythm, music and the way words are said. They often enjoy conversation, remember what was said, and are sensitive to noise. In NLP descriptions their eyes move sideways, toward the ears, when they think.

Feature	Typical tendency (as described in NLP literature)
Posture	Head tilted, as if listening; may lean forward
Breathing	Even, mid-chest or diaphragm
Voice	Melodic, well-modulated, medium tempo
Gestures	Touches ear or jaw; taps rhythms
Memory	Recalls conversations, sequences, tunes
Learning	Lectures, discussion, podcasts, reading aloud
Values	Being listened to; the 'right tone'

Auditory predicates

hear	listen	sound	tell	say
ring	tune	loud	quiet	harmony
click	resonate	echo	voice	rhythm

Auditory phrase	Meaning
“That rings a bell.”	That seems familiar.
“We're on the same wavelength.”	We agree / understand each other.
“That sounds like a plan.”	I agree.
“It just clicked.”	Suddenly I understood.

Communication tip

Auditory processors notice *how* something is said as much as what is said. A warm, well-paced phone call may land better than a long email.

SECTION 07

Auditory Digital (Ad): The Inner Voice

Auditory digital is not a sense in the usual way. It describes thinking in **words, logic and self-talk** — the running commentary many people hear in their heads. NLP treats it as a 'meta' system: a way of labelling and evaluating experience from the other senses.

People who rely heavily on Ad tend to want things to *make sense*. They like facts, procedures and step-by-step reasoning, and may talk to themselves (out loud or silently) when solving problems.

Feature	Typical tendency (as described in NLP literature)
Posture	Arms folded, head tilted, 'telephone posture'
Breathing	Restricted, high in chest
Voice	Monotone, precise, measured
Language	Unspecified, abstract words: think, understand, process, consider, know
Learning	Logical sequences, written summaries, checklists
Strength	Analysis, planning, careful decisions
Risk	Over-thinking; negative self-talk loops

Ad / unspecified words

think	know	understand	consider	process
decide	learn	logical	sense	detail
sequence	analyse	question	conclude	fact

> **Practical note**
>
> Changing the *qualities* of self-talk (slower, softer, kinder, or in a silly cartoon voice) is a common NLP technique for reducing its emotional grip. See Submodalities, Section 19.

SECTION 08

The Kinesthetic System (K)

Kinesthetic processors experience the world through **touch, movement and feelings**. They are often described as speaking more slowly, pausing to check how something feels, and learning best by doing. NLP distinguishes external sensations (Ke: temperature, texture, pressure) from internal ones (Ki: emotions, gut feelings, bodily states).

Feature	Typical tendency (as described in NLP literature)
Posture	Relaxed, rounded shoulders, head down; moves a lot
Breathing	Deep, low in the belly
Voice	Slower, deeper, with pauses
Gestures	Touches self and others; gestures near the body
Memory	Remembers what was done and how it felt
Learning	Hands-on practice, role play, building, walking about
Values	Comfort, connection, practical results

Kinesthetic predicates

feel	touch	grasp	handle	solid
smooth	rough	warm	heavy	pressure
tense	stuck	concrete	push	flow

Kinesthetic phrase	Meaning
“I can't get a grip on it.”	I don't understand it yet.
“Let's touch base.”	Let's catch up.
“It's a weight off my shoulders.”	I feel relieved.
“That's a heated argument.”	An emotional disagreement.

> **Communication tip**
>
> Give kinesthetic processors time. Rushing them for an answer often produces resistance; offering a chance to *try it out* or walk through it step by step builds confidence.

SECTION 09

Olfactory & Gustatory (O/G)

Smell and taste are the least discussed systems in everyday NLP training, partly because English has fewer words for them and partly because they rarely dominate a person's thinking style. They are often grouped with kinesthetic experience. Yet they are powerful: smell has a short route to the brain's emotion and memory centres, and a single scent can bring back a vivid scene.

smell	scent	taste	sweet
fragrant	fishy	bitter	sour
stale	fresh	salty	bland
whiff	nose	savour	spicy
aroma	stink	flavour	palate

System	Phrase	Meaning
Olfactory	“Something smells fishy.”	It seems suspicious.
Olfactory	“A breath of fresh air.”	A welcome change.
Olfactory	“I can smell trouble.”	I sense a problem coming.
Gustatory	“A bitter pill to swallow.”	Hard to accept.
Gustatory	“That leaves a bad taste.”	It feels wrong or unfair.
Gustatory	“A sweet deal.”	A very good arrangement.

Application

Smell and taste can be used deliberately as **anchors**: a particular scent during study or a calming tea before a presentation can help re-access a useful state later.

Why include O and G at all?

- They complete the sensory picture in guided imagery and storytelling.
- Food, perfume, hospitality and wine professionals often rely on them heavily.
- Smell-triggered memories (the 'Proust effect') tend to feel especially emotional and vivid.

SECTION 10

Predicates: The Master Table

Use this table as a listening guide. When a person uses several words from one column, NLP suggests answering in the same column to build rapport.

Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic	Olf. / Gust.	Unspecified (Ad)
see	hear	feel	smell	think
look	listen	touch	scent	know
view	sound	grasp	fresh	understand
appear	tell	handle	stale	consider
show	say	solid	fragrant	process
clear	ring	heavy	taste	decide
focus	tune	warm	sweet	sense
picture	harmony	pressure	bitter	learn
bright	loud	rough	sour	change
vision	voice	smooth	savour	logical
perspective	resonate	stuck	flavour	motivate

Same message, five systems

System	“I understand you” becomes ...
Visual	“I see exactly what you mean — it's clear now.”
Auditory	“I hear you loud and clear; that rings true.”
Kinesthetic	“I've got a real feel for what you're going through.”
Olf. / Gust.	“I can almost taste what you're after.”
Unspecified	“I understand what you're thinking.”

Tip: unspecified words are neutral — useful when you don't know someone's preference or are speaking to a mixed group.

SECTION 11

Preferred, Lead & Reference Systems

NLP distinguishes three different 'jobs' a representational system can do in one stream of thought. A person may use different systems for each, and the pattern can change with context.



Term	Definition	How to notice it
Preferred / primary system	The system a person most often uses to process and describe experience, especially under stress	Predicates across a conversation
Lead (input) system	The system used to first access or retrieve information	Eye movements just before answering
Reference system	The system used to confirm that something is true, right or known	“How do you know when …?”
Unconscious system	The system least in awareness — often where problems or strong emotions live	What the person never mentions

Worked example

Asked “What did you have for breakfast?” a person glances up-left (lead: Vr), says “Mm, it was a lovely warm porridge” (primary: K), and adds “yes, I'm sure” after a pause (reference: Ad).

SECTION 12

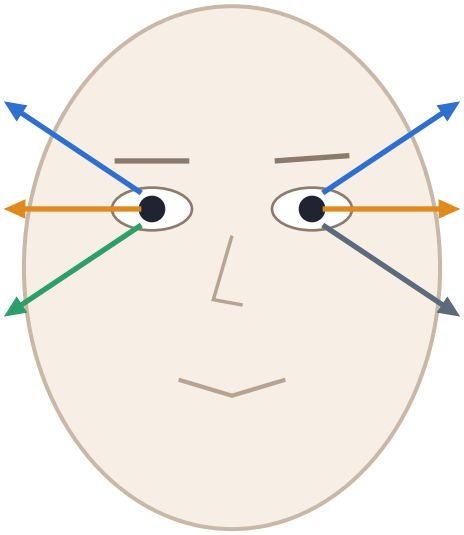
Eye Accessing Cues

In *Frogs into Princes* (1979) Bandler and Grinder proposed that unconscious eye movements reveal which system a person is accessing. The standard chart below is for a so-called "normally organised" right-handed person, **as you look at them**.

Vc
Visual constructed
imagining new images

Vr
Visual remembered
recalling images

Their LEFT is on YOUR right →



Ac
Auditory constructed
creating new sounds

Ar
Auditory remembered
recalling sounds

K
Kinesthetic
feelings, sensations

Ad
Auditory digital
internal dialogue

Defocused / straight ahead: visual processing (V)

Some left-handed people and others show a mirror-image pattern. NLP trainers therefore advise **calibrating** each individual by asking test questions and watching their eyes, rather than assuming the chart applies.

Up	Level	Down	L / R
Visual pictures	Auditory sounds	Feelings (K) or self-talk (Ad)	their left = remembered their right = constructed

Memory aid for the standard chart.

Eye Cues: Calibration Questions

Direction (their view)	Code	Calibration question
Up and to their left	Vr	“What colour is your front door?”
Up and to their right	Vc	“Imagine your room painted bright orange.”
Level, to their left	Ar	“What does your phone's ringtone sound like?”
Level, to their right	Ac	“Imagine a dog meowing like a cat.”
Down and to their left	Ad	“What do you say to yourself when things go wrong?”
Down and to their right	K	“How does it feel to step into a warm bath?”
Defocused / straight ahead	V	Any question requiring quick visual access

What the research says

Eye accessing cues are among the most tested NLP claims, and the evidence is weak. Reviews in the 1980s (e.g. Sharpley 1984, 1987) found little support. A 2012 study by Wiseman and colleagues tested whether eye direction could reveal lying — a popular extension of the model — and found no relationship.

Claim	Status
Eyes move during thinking	Generally accepted; shifting gaze helps reduce visual distraction
Direction reliably shows sensory mode	Not supported in controlled studies
Up-right means lying	Not supported (Wiseman et al., 2012)
Individual calibration may reveal personal patterns	Plausible but largely untested

Use with care

Treat eye cues as a **hypothesis to check**, never as proof of what someone thinks or whether they are honest.

SECTION 13

Other Non-Verbal Indicators

Beyond words and eyes, NLP describes characteristic **physiology** for each system. These cues are tendencies, not rules, and are best used together with predicates.

Cue	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic	Auditory digital
Breathing	High, shallow, chest	Even, mid-chest	Deep, belly	Restricted, high
Voice tempo	Fast	Rhythmic, medium	Slow, with pauses	Monotone, measured
Voice tone	Higher, clear	Melodic, resonant	Lower, softer	Crisp, clipped
Posture	Upright, head up	Head tilted	Rounded, relaxed	Arms folded, upright
Muscle tone	Tense shoulders	Rhythmic movement	Relaxed, loose	Some tension
Gestures	At eye level, pointing	Near ears, rhythmic	Near body, touching	Hand to chin
Skin colour	May pale	Even	May flush	Even
Lip shape	Thin, tight	Moves with words	Full, soft	Tight

Gestures as cues

Visual
Pointing to the eyes or drawing shapes in the air while explaining.

Auditory
Touching the ear, or tapping a beat while thinking.

Kinesthetic
Hand on chest or stomach when describing a decision.

Calibrate, don't assume

Physiology also reflects mood, culture, health and context. A person breathing high in the chest may simply have climbed the stairs. Notice **changes** in someone's baseline rather than reading single snapshots.

SECTION 14

Self-Assessment Questionnaire

This informal questionnaire, modelled on common NLP training exercises, gives a rough picture of your current preferences. For each item, rank the four endings: **4** = most like you, **3** = next, **2** = next, **1** = least like you.

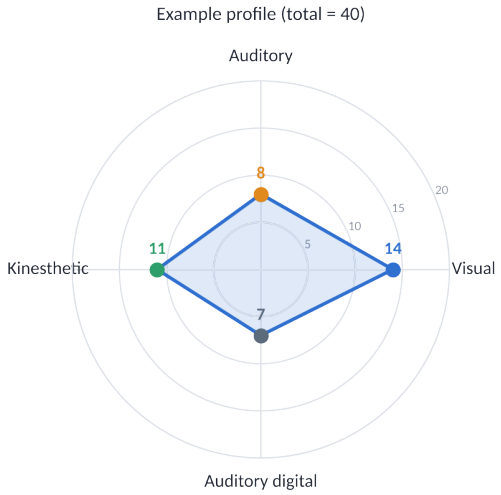
#	Statement	Endings to rank
1	I make important decisions based on …	(a) gut feeling (b) what sounds best (c) what looks best (d) careful study of the facts
2	During an argument I am most influenced by …	(a) the other person's tone (b) whether I can see their point (c) the logic of their argument (d) whether I feel they are sincere
3	I most easily show how I'm doing through …	(a) the way I dress and look (b) the feelings I share (c) the words I choose (d) my tone of voice
4	It is easiest for me to …	(a) find the ideal volume on a stereo (b) pick the most relevant points in a subject (c) choose the most comfortable furniture (d) pick rich colour combinations
5	I am very …	(a) attuned to sounds around me (b) good at making sense of new facts (c) sensitive to how clothes feel on my body (d) responsive to colours and the look of a room
6	When learning something new I prefer to …	(a) watch a demonstration (b) have it explained aloud (c) try it hands-on (d) read the instructions step by step

Scoring & Interpreting Your Results

Copy your ranking for each ending into the column given by the answer key, then add each column. With six items, each column ranges from 6 to 24 and all four totals add up to 60.

Answer key

Item	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic	Auditory digital
1	c	b	a	d
2	b	a	d	c
3	a	d	b	c
4	d	a	c	b
5	d	a	c	b
6	a	b	c	d



Reading the profile

- A clearly higher score suggests a **preferred** system in the contexts you pictured while answering.
- Close scores suggest a **flexible**, balanced style.
- Your lowest score may be the system you are **least aware** of — a growth area.
- Results shift with mood, task and setting; repeat in different contexts.

Chart: a hypothetical respondent from a shorter four-item version (totals 4–16 per system).

Pattern	What it may suggest	Try this
High V	Thinks in images; values overview	Mind-maps, sketch ideas, colour notes
High A	Thinks in sound and dialogue	Talk ideas through, record voice memos
High K	Thinks through feeling and action	Prototype, walk while thinking, role-play
High Ad	Thinks in words and logic	Checklists, written summaries, frameworks
Flat profile	Switches easily between systems	Use this flexibility with different audiences

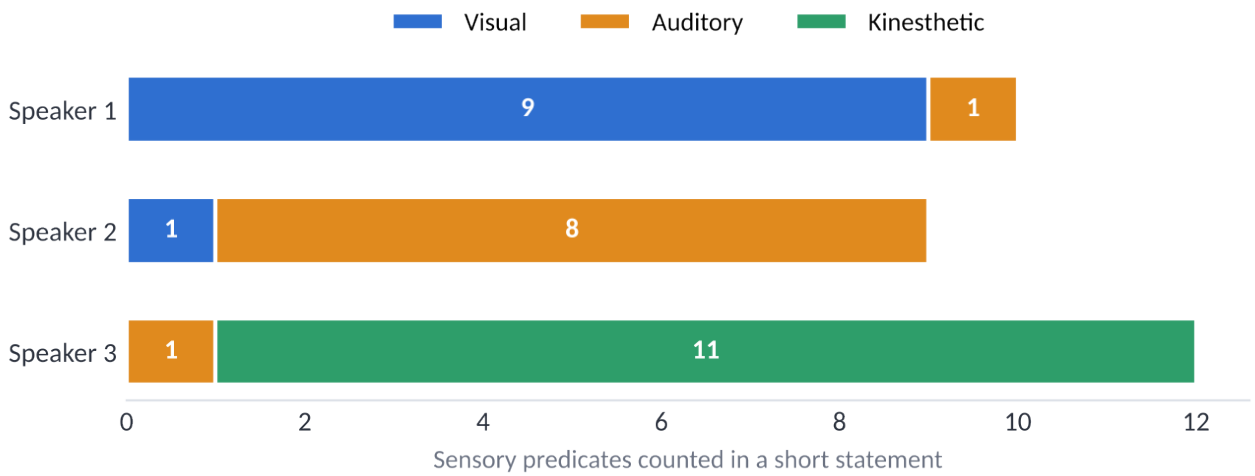
Important: this is a self-reflection tool, not a validated psychometric test. Use it to become more aware of language and attention, not to label yourself or others.

SECTION 15

Matching Representational Systems

Matching means responding in the same sensory language as the other person. NLP claims that this makes people feel understood at an unconscious level. Mismatching — replying in a different system — can leave the other person feeling unheard, even when the content is correct.

Listening for predicates: three short statements



Counts produced by matching each statement against the predicate lists in this guide. Every speaker uses a mix; the question is which system *dominates*.

Speaker says	Mismatched reply	Matched reply
“I just can't **see** where this is going.”	“Let me **tell** you about it.” (A)	“Let me **show** you the bigger **picture**.” (V)
“This whole plan **sounds** off to me.”	“Look at the numbers.” (V)	“What part doesn't **ring** true?” (A)
“I **feel** overwhelmed by all this.”	“It's **clear** enough, surely?” (V)	“Let's **take** it one piece at a time.” (K)

Beyond vocabulary

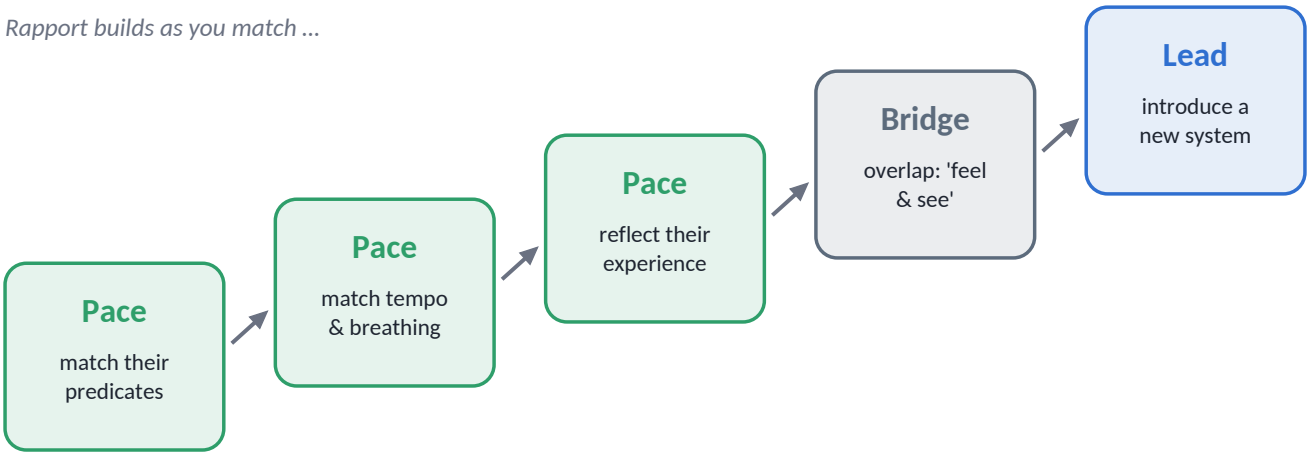
Match the **process**, not just the words: if someone says “I need to see it,” actually showing them something matters more than saying “see”.

SECTION 16

Pacing and Leading

Matching is the first half of a two-step process. **Pacing** means meeting people where they are — in their system, their tempo, their experience. Once rapport is established, **leading** gently introduces a different system or perspective, for example to help someone stuck in a bad feeling see new options.

Rapport builds as you match …



… then the other person follows your lead

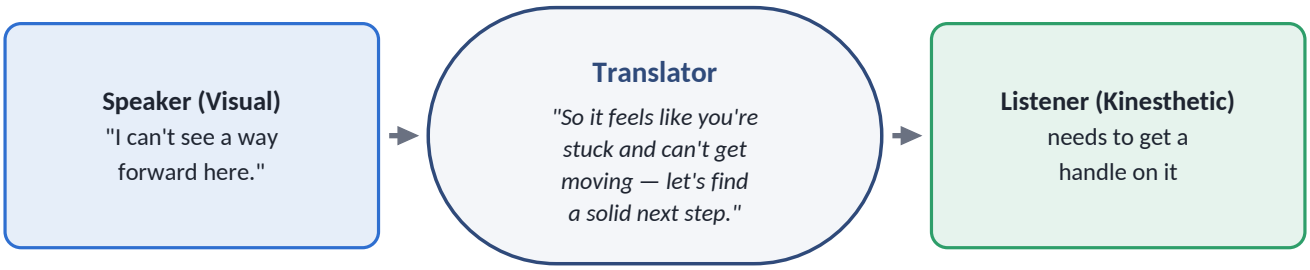
Step	What you do	Example (person stuck in K)
1. Pace	Match predicates, breathing and voice tempo	“It sounds like this feels really heavy right now.”
2. Pace	Reflect their experience back accurately	“There's a lot of pressure and you feel stuck.”
3. Bridge	Use an overlapping phrase linking two systems	“As you feel that, and look at what's actually in front of you …”
4. Lead	Shift into the target system	“… what can you see that might be a first step?”
5. Check	Notice whether they follow; if not, return to pacing	Shift in posture, breathing or language

> **Rule of thumb**
>
> If the other person doesn't follow your lead, you haven't paced long enough. Go back, match again, and try a smaller step.

SECTION 17

Translating Between Systems

Misunderstandings often happen when two people describe the same thing in different systems — and each thinks the other "just doesn't get it". A skilled communicator acts as a **translator**.



Original (system)	Visual version	Auditory version	Kinesthetic version
"I'm confused." (Ad)	It's all hazy.	It's just noise to me.	I can't get a grip on it.
"I like the idea." (Ad)	It looks good.	It sounds great.	It feels right.
"We disagree." (Ad)	We see it differently.	We're not in tune.	We're at odds / clashing.
"Explain it." (Ad)	Show me.	Talk me through it.	Walk me through it.
"I'm focused." (V)	—	Everything's quiet; I'm tuned in.	I'm locked on; fully in it.
"It's urgent." (Ad)	It's a red flag.	Alarm bells are ringing.	We're under pressure.

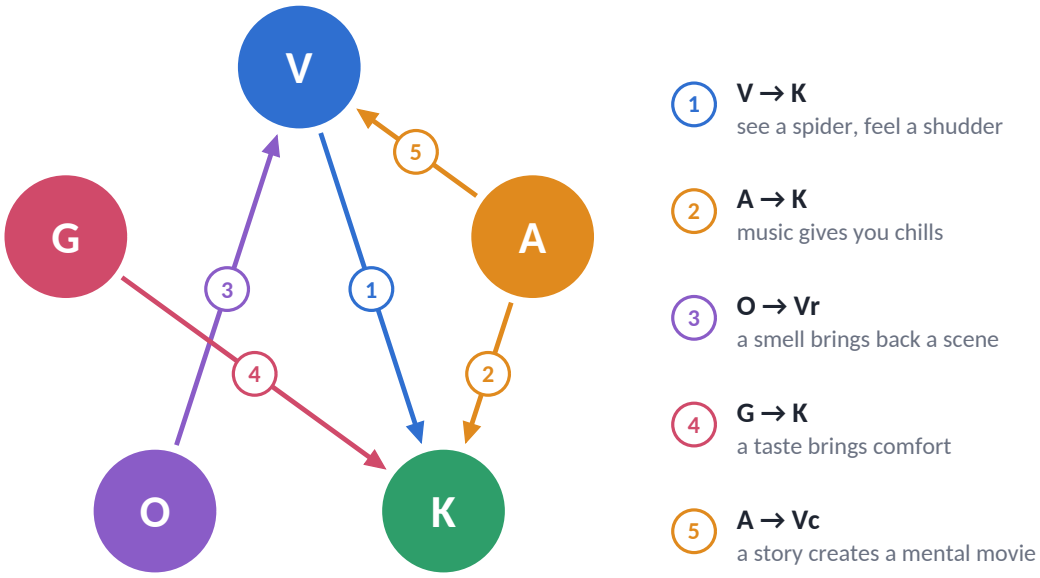
Group tip

When presenting to a group, deliberately cycle through all three main systems: show a visual, explain it aloud, and give people something to do or feel. This reaches everyone without guessing individual preferences.

SECTION 18

Overlaps & Synesthesia Patterns

Rep systems rarely work alone. In NLP, an automatic link from one system to another is called a **synesthesia pattern** (not to be confused with clinical synaesthesia, a rare neurological trait). These links are useful — a memory can be re-entered fully through one sense — but they can also drive unwanted reactions, such as a picture instantly triggering anxiety.



Overlapping to enrich experience

Overlapping is the deliberate use of one system to open up others. Guided imagery, storytelling and hypnosis use it to make an experience vivid:

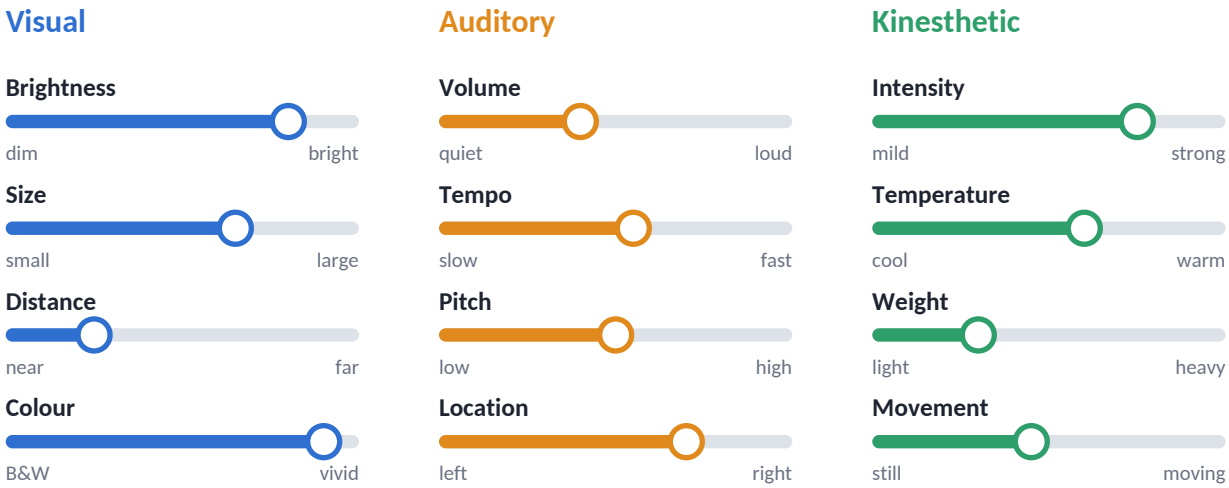
> **Overlap script**
>
> “Imagine you're on a beach (V). Hear the waves rolling in (A). Feel the warm sand under your feet (K). Notice the salty sea air (O), and the taste of salt on your lips (G).”

Starting from someone's preferred system and adding others one by one usually makes the experience easier to enter than asking for all senses at once.

SECTION 19

Submodalities: The Fine Detail

If rep systems (modalities) are the channels, **submodalities** are the settings on each channel — brightness, size, volume, location, temperature. NLP holds that changing submodalities changes the *emotional intensity* of an experience, often more than changing its content.



Modality	Common submodalities
Visual	Colour / B&W;, brightness, size, distance, location, focus, still / moving, framed / panoramic, associated / dissociated
Auditory	Volume, pitch, tempo, rhythm, tone, location, distance, mono / stereo, whose voice
Kinesthetic	Intensity, location in body, temperature, pressure, weight, texture, movement, size, shape
Olf. / Gust.	Sweet, sour, bitter, salty, intensity, pleasant / unpleasant

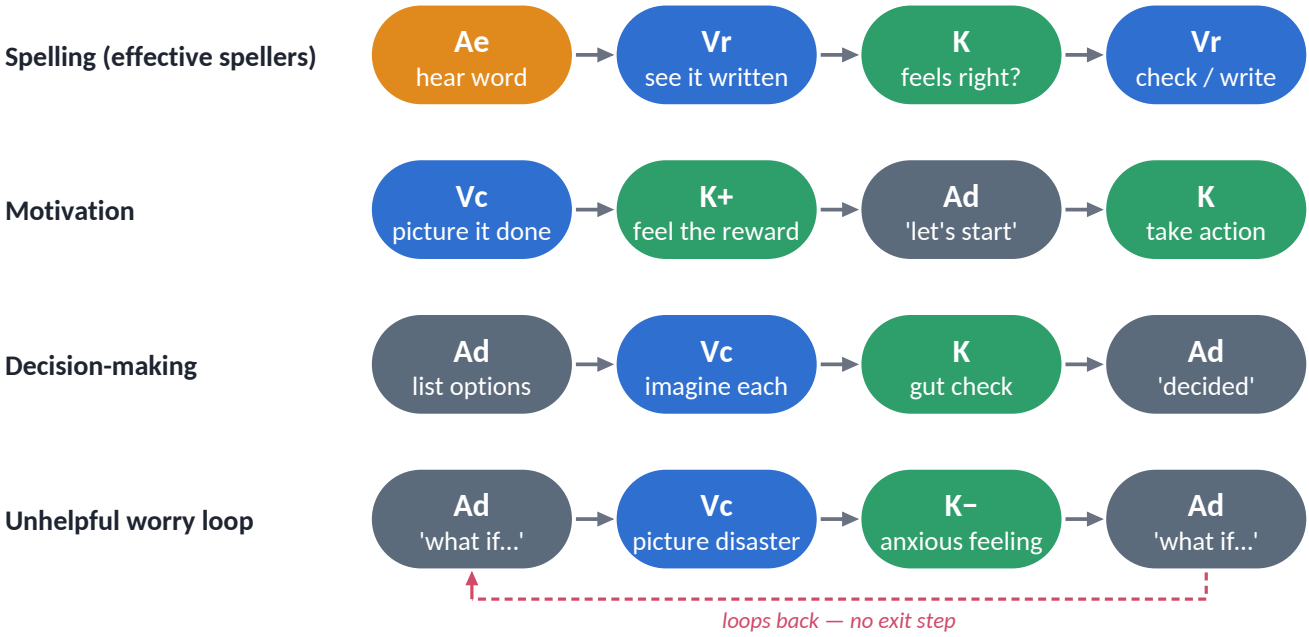
Try it

Recall a mildly annoying memory. Notice the picture. Now make it smaller, push it further away, drain the colour and turn down any sound. For many people the feeling weakens. Reverse the changes for a positive memory to intensify it.

SECTION 20

Strategies: Sequences of Representational Systems

A **strategy** in NLP is the ordered sequence of rep systems someone runs to produce a result — spelling a word, getting motivated, choosing a meal. Writing it in VAKOG notation lets you copy an effective strategy or fix one that loops.



Notation	Meaning
e / i	External (from outside) / internal (from inside), e.g. Ve = seeing something real
r / c	Remembered / constructed
+ / –	Pleasant / unpleasant feeling
→	Leads to the next step

Example

Robert Dilts' widely taught "spelling strategy" is a classic example: good spellers are said to look up and recall the word as a picture (Vr), then check with a feeling of familiarity (K). Teaching poor spellers to do the same is a well-known NLP classroom technique.

SECTION 21

Applications: Communication, Sales & Leadership

Communication

match words to the listener's channel

Learning

teach through several senses at once

Change work

notice how a problem is represented

Context	Visual approach	Auditory approach	Kinesthetic approach
Presentations	Clean slides, diagrams, demos	Stories, varied tone, pauses	Activities, props, movement
Sales	Brochures, photos, 'picture yourself …'	Testimonials, 'hear what clients say'	Trials, samples, 'get a feel for it'
Emails	Bullets, bold, white space	Conversational, rhythmic	Warm, personal, concrete next step
Feedback	Show examples of good work	Talk it through, tone matters	Acknowledge feelings, practical support
Leadership vision	Paint a picture of the future	Communicate the message clearly and often	Make people feel part of it
Negotiation	Visual summaries of options	Restate their words exactly	Find common ground, comfort

A balanced message

> **One sentence, four systems**
>
> “Let me **show** you the plan (V). I'd like to **hear** what you think of it (A), and make sure everyone **feels** comfortable with the next steps (K) — so we all **understand** where we're going (Ad).”

One-to-one checklist

- Listen for the first few predicates and match them early in the conversation.
- Watch for the moment someone 'gets it' — and notice which system you were using.
- When you meet resistance, switch systems before you repeat yourself louder.

SECTION 22

Applications: Teaching & Learning

Rep systems became popular in education alongside the VAK “learning styles” movement. The practical lesson that holds up best is **multi-sensory teaching**: presenting material through several channels helps most learners, regardless of preference.

Subject	See (V)	Hear (A)	Do / feel (K)
Vocabulary	Word cards, colour-coded roots	Say and repeat aloud, rhymes	Act out meanings, trace letters
Maths	Diagrams, number lines, graphs	Explain reasoning aloud	Blocks, measuring, real objects
History	Timelines, maps, images	Stories, debates, podcasts	Role-play, re-enactment
Science	Labelled diagrams, videos	Discussion, explanations	Experiments, models
Languages	Subtitled video, flashcards	Listening, songs, conversation	Gestures (TPR), real tasks

What the evidence says about matching to learning style

A major review by Pashler and colleagues (2008) found no adequate evidence for the “meshing hypothesis” — the idea that students learn better when teaching matches their preferred style. Later reviews reached similar conclusions.

Practice	Evidence
Labelling students as 'visual' or 'kinesthetic' learners	Not supported; can limit learners
Matching instruction to a diagnosed style	Not supported
Combining words and pictures (dual coding)	Well supported
Active, hands-on practice and retrieval	Well supported

> **Takeaway**
>
> Use VAK as a **checklist for variety** in teaching, not as a way to sort learners into boxes.

SECTION 23

Applications: Coaching & Change Work

In coaching and NLP-based change work, rep systems are used to understand **how** a problem is structured inside someone's experience. The same situation can be a huge, bright picture for one person and a nagging inner voice for another — and each calls for a different intervention.

Technique	Rep systems involved	Purpose
Visual squash	V, K	Integrate two conflicting 'parts' imagined in each hand
Swish pattern	V (submodalities)	Replace an unwanted cue picture with a desired self-image
Anchoring	K, A, V (any)	Link a resource state to a touch, word or image
Fast phobia technique	V (dissociation), K	Watch the memory as a distant B&W; film to reduce fear
Changing self-talk	Ad, A	Alter the voice's tone, speed or location
Future pacing	Vc, K	Rehearse a new behaviour in an imagined future

Questions coaches ask

To elicit ...	Ask
Visual structure	“When you think about it, what do you see? How big, how close?”
Auditory structure	“Is there a sound or voice? Whose voice is it? Where is it coming from?”
Kinesthetic structure	“Where in your body do you feel it? Is it moving?”
Reference system	“How do you know when you've got it right?”

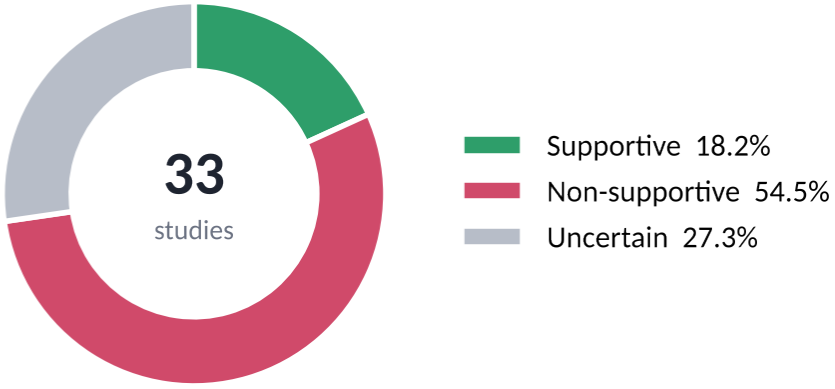
These techniques have limited formal research support; they should not replace evidence-based treatment for clinical conditions.

SECTION 24

Evidence & Criticism

Representational systems are intuitive and widely taught, but the scientific evidence for NLP's specific claims is weak. A fair summary should separate what is useful from what is unproven.

Witkowski (2010): empirical studies of NLP tenets



Witkowski (2010) selected 63 studies from 315 articles in ISI-listed journals; the percentages refer to the 33 empirical studies analysed in detail.

Claim	Verdict	Notes
People have a stable preferred rep system	Weak	Preferences shift by context; tests show poor reliability
Predicates reveal current processing	Mixed	Some correlation in early studies; not consistent
Eye movements show the system in use	Not supported	Controlled studies fail to replicate
Matching predicates improves rapport	Mixed / weak	Small effects in some studies; others none
Multi-sensory language is engaging	Plausible	Fits research on imagery, dual coding and vivid language

Balanced view

Use rep systems as a lens for **noticing language and attention**, and for making communication richer. Avoid treating them as a diagnostic system or making claims about others' minds.

SECTION 25

Practice Exercises

Short exercises to build sensory awareness and flexible communication. Most take 5–15 minutes.

1

Predicate hunt

Listen to a podcast or meeting for 10 minutes. Tally V, A, K and Ad words. Which dominates?

2

Rewrite in three

Take one paragraph from an email you sent. Rewrite it three times: visual, auditory, kinesthetic.

3

Matching practice

In your next conversation, deliberately match the other person's predicates for five minutes. Notice any change.

4

Calibration

With a partner, ask the calibration questions from Section 12. Note their actual eye patterns — do they fit the chart?

5

Submodality shift

Recall a pleasant memory. Make it bigger, brighter and closer, and turn up the sound. Rate the feeling before and after (1–10).

6

Sensory walk

Walk for 5 minutes noticing only sights, then only sounds, then only sensations, then smells. Which was easiest?

7

Map your strategy

Pick something you do well (e.g. choosing a gift). Write the VAKOG steps you run, using the notation from Section 20.

8

Translator

Next time two colleagues disagree, restate each person's view in the other's system.

SECTION 26

Quick Reference

	Visual	Auditory	Kinesthetic	Aud. digital
Thinks in	Pictures	Sounds	Feelings	Words, logic
Key words	see, look, clear	hear, sound, tell	feel, grasp, solid	think, know, sense
Eyes (their view)	Up L/R	Level L/R	Down right	Down left
Breathing	High chest	Mid chest	Belly	Restricted
Voice	Fast, high	Melodic	Slow, deep	Monotone
Learns by	Seeing	Listening	Doing	Reasoning
Persuade with	Show it	Say it	Let them try it	Prove it
Say	“Looks good”	“Sounds good”	“Feels good”	“Makes sense”

The core skill

Listen for predicates → match them → pace → bridge → lead.

When in doubt

Use all senses with groups. Use unspecified words when unsure.

Glossary

Term	Meaning
Predicate	A sensory-based word that reveals a rep system
Calibration	Learning a specific person's patterns by observation
Pacing / leading	Matching someone, then guiding them to a new state or system
Submodality	A quality within a sense (size, volume, warmth …)
Strategy	The sequence of rep systems used to produce a result
Synesthesia pattern	An automatic link from one sense to another