Representational Systems

We form our internal mental maps of the external world by taking information in via our 5 senses, coded through pictures (Visual), sounds (Auditory), feelings (Kinesthetic), smells (Olfactory) and tastes (Gustatory). These senses are known within NLP as the Representational Systems. When we re-present experiences to ourselves, we do so in pictures, sounds, feelings, smells and tastes.

Although we do use all 5 representational systems, the key systems we use daily are Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic (VAK).

In NLP, when we use representational systems to create strong connections with others, we calibrate and use the same representational system an individual is using in the moment. We do this by calibrating their eye movement patterns, as discussed in the section on eye accessing cues. We also do this by paying attention to a persons words, or predicates.

Representational System Predicates

We use words to describe our thoughts. Therefore our choice of words will indicate which representational system we are using. For example, ‘I see what you are saying’ would predicate that you are talking visually. Further examples for the key representational systems are:

**Visual** See, look, dim, clear, colour, bright, notice, view, illuminate, hazy, foresee, glance, watch, glow, picture, dim.

**Auditory** Hear, sound, chatter, call, shout, whisper, listen, silence, voice, articulate, call, melodic, hubbub, tune, shrill.

**Kinesthetic** Feel, touch, rough, smooth, sharp, soft, scrape, scour, solid, shake, stroke, throb, silky, texture, damp, dry, numb.

As well as individual words you may notice people using predicate phrases, for example:

**Visual** In light of, mind’s eye, see to it, dim view.
Auditory  Call on, tongue-tied, loud and clear, voice an opinion.

Kinesthetic  Get a handle on, pull some strings, get a feel for, grasp the situation

See if you can add ten more predicates and predicate phrases in each category.

Lead Representational System

This is the system a person uses to open their internal files and is indicated by eye movement.

Primary Representational System

This is the representational system a person prefers and is indicated by the words they use, i.e., they talk primarily in this representational system.

When communicating with another person, one way of establishing rapport and making a strong connection with them is to speak in the same primary or dominant representational system they use.

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Characteristics of the Representational systems

Each representational system has a number of characteristics that tend to go with them.

**Visual:** People in visual mode will tend to breathe high up. They will often look up. In this mode, people will tend to draw pictures with their hands and speak quite quickly. They will tend to notice visuals and appearances more than people not in this mode.

**Auditory:** In this mode, people will tend to breathe from the middle. Their eyes will tend to move sideways across the central plane. They will have strong recall by hearing sounds. They like to talk things through and enjoy dialogue.

**Kinesthetic:** Kinesthetic mode people will breathe lower down. They will be aware of bodily sensations and feelings. People in this mode can be very tactile. They will enjoy physical experiences.