

## **What Second Life Taught Me about Learning\*\***

Diane Murley\*\*\*

*Ms. Murley discusses her several attempts to learn to use Second Life and how joining a workshop that was compatible with her learning style finally made it possible for her to succeed. As a result of the experience, she learned to be more aware of her own learning preferences and those of others. She recommends evaluating your learning style and using a study strategy appropriate to that style to learn something you have previously found to be difficult.*

### **Introduction**

¶1 When I taught first-year legal research, I researched learning styles and tried to incorporate something for each style into my teaching.<sup>1</sup> I kept the lecture portion of my classes short, and I used diagrams and other illustrations to help explain the topic. I recorded the lectures and posted the audio recordings and my presentation slides to a class blog so the students could use them to review. I assigned or recommended both readings and CALI lessons. Almost every class included an in-class exercise.

¶2 But I never really thought about my own learning preferences and how they affected my ability to learn until I tried using the online virtual world, Second Life.<sup>2</sup> I can usually teach myself new software or electronics fairly easily, either by reading part of a manual or by running through a tutorial. Part of my ease with these tools probably results from the jobs I have held, which have given me plenty of practice in learning, using, and teaching others to use new technological tools.

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\* *Editor's Note:* "Technology for Everyone" is a regular feature of *Law Library Journal*. In each article, author Diane Murley reviews a tool that can help law librarians do their jobs even better. To supplement her articles Ms. Murley posts ideas for using technology to improve or expand law library services on her Technology for Law Libraries blog, <http://tech4lawlibs.blog.asu.edu>.

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1. For more information about teaching students with different learning styles, see generally Diane Murley, *Innovative Instructional Methods*, LEGAL REFERENCE SERVICES Q., 2007, no. 1/2, at 171, published simultaneously in PUBLIC SERVICES IN LAW LIBRARIES: EVOLUTION AND INNOVATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY 171 (Barbara Bintliff & Lee F. Peoples eds., 2007).

2. Second Life: Official Site of the 3D Online Virtual World, <http://secondlife.com> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

¶3 However, when I tried to teach myself how to use Second Life, I was twice stumped. For a variety of reasons I persisted, in part because I hate being stumped. In retrospect, now that I have finally learned the basics of Second Life, I realize that my previous failures were because of learning-style issues. I didn't think about my learning preferences, so I didn't choose ways to learn about Second Life that would have worked well with those preferences. I am a multimodal learner. I should have approached my learning in the same way I approached teaching—using multiple strategies or modes to help me learn.

### Second Life

¶4 Second Life is “a 3-D virtual world created by its Residents.”<sup>3</sup> Users, who are called residents,<sup>4</sup> create an avatar to represent themselves<sup>5</sup> as they participate in various activities in-world.<sup>6</sup> Unlike online role-playing games, Second Life has very few rules and no storyline or quest to constrain the action.<sup>7</sup> Within the limits of the terms of use and community standards, residents are free to use Second Life to create or do whatever they imagine.<sup>8</sup> Some participants use it as an extension of their real lives, and some use it as an alternate reality.<sup>9</sup>

¶5 How Second Life and other virtual worlds can best be used to enhance law library services is still a matter of discussion. Very few law students currently use Second Life,<sup>10</sup> and many of them will not want to spend the time to learn how to use it once they get to law school.<sup>11</sup> But some librarians and educators are using Second Life to give students opportunities that are not possible in real life.<sup>12</sup> Projects like Harvard's in-world mock trial of a real dispute about Second Life property,<sup>13</sup> conferences that are conducted simultaneously in Second Life and the real world,<sup>14</sup> and Seton Hall's Constitution Day program that took place in a

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3. Second Life, What Is Second Life?, <http://secondlife.com/whatis> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).
  4. Second Life Wikia, Resident, <http://secondlife.wikia.com/wiki/Resident> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).
  5. Second Life Wikia, Avatar, <http://secondlife.wikia.com/wiki/Avatar> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).
  6. The term “in-world” refers to events that take place in Second Life. Second Life Wikia, In-world, <http://secondlife.wikia.com/wiki/In-world> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).
  7. Meg Kribble, *A Law Librarian's Second Life*, AALL SPECTRUM, Nov. 2007, at 12, 13.
  8. *Id.*; Second Life, FAQ, <http://secondlife.com/whatis/faq.php> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).
  9. See Posting of Lem Skall to Not Possible in Real Life, More Advice for Newbies (But First Time It Comes from Me), <http://npirl.blogspot.com/2007/12/more-advice-for-newbies-but-first-time.html> (Dec. 28, 2007).
  10. Laurie Ralston, Technology Use Practices and Desires of Students—What Do They Really Want?, program presented at the 2008 Conference for Law School Computing, Baltimore, Md. (June 20, 2008), available at <http://wiki.cali.org/calicon08/index.php?n=Sessions.443>.
  11. See Rob Hudson, *A Little Grafting of Second Life into a Legal Research Class*, <http://www.llrx.com/features/secondlife.htm> (May 9, 2008).
  12. See Kribble, *supra* note 7, at 14–15; Hudson, *supra* note 11.
  13. See CyberOne Wiki, Bragg v. Linden Labs Moot Court in Second Life, [http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/cyberone/wiki/Bragg\\_v.\\_Linden\\_Labs\\_Moot\\_Court\\_in\\_Second\\_Life](http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/cyberone/wiki/Bragg_v._Linden_Labs_Moot_Court_in_Second_Life) (last visited Aug. 6, 2008). The real-life case is *Bragg v. Linden Research, Inc.*, 487 F. Supp. 2d 593 (E.D. Pa. 2007).
  14. See, e.g., Berkman Center for Internet & Society, Upcoming Events, <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/events> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

Second Life recreation of the Guantánamo Bay detention center<sup>15</sup> were among the reasons that I wanted to learn enough about Second Life to participate.

¶6 Second Life also interested me because several of the faculty members I support write about legal issues relating to virtual worlds.<sup>16</sup> Almost any legal issue that has arisen in real life can arise in Second Life.<sup>17</sup> Enough attorneys and law firms have offices in Second Life that they have established a SL Bar Association,<sup>18</sup> which recently offered a speaker series in Second Life that was approved for MCLE credit by the State Bar of California.<sup>19</sup> In addition, my university owns land in Second Life, and I assume that eventually the law school will want to have a presence in Second Life.

### *Trying to Learn Second Life*

¶7 During my first two attempts to learn how to use Second Life, I completed the tutorials on Orientation Island<sup>20</sup> and Help Island.<sup>21</sup> I explored some in-world libraries I had heard about, but I didn't have a good idea of how to find interesting places on my own or how to use Second Life to create something useful. And even after going through the tutorials twice, I still felt so clumsy moving my avatar that I wasn't ready to attend an event where there would be many other people.

¶8 In April 2008, I heard about the Virtual World Law Librarianship Workshop being hosted by the American Association of Law Libraries and funded by a grant from the AALL/BNA Continuing Education Grants Program.<sup>22</sup> We began with a webinar on April 16, followed by several weeks during which we met in Second Life weekly for a presentation and demonstration of the week's topic by Kate Fitz.<sup>23</sup> Before each session we had a reading assignment or an activity to complete

15. See Press Release, Seton Hall School of Law, Seton Hall School of Law on Second Life: Constitution Day Program on Interrogation and Intelligence Gathering to be Featured at Virtual Guantánamo Bay Detention Center (Sept. 7, 2007), [http://law.shu.edu/administration/public\\_relations/press\\_releases/2007/shl\\_second\\_life\\_constitution\\_day\\_sept7.htm](http://law.shu.edu/administration/public_relations/press_releases/2007/shl_second_life_constitution_day_sept7.htm).
16. E.g., Adam S. Chodorow, *Ability-to-Pay and the Taxation of Virtual Income*, 75 TENN. L. REV. (forthcoming Summer 2008), available at [http://works.bepress.com/adam\\_chodorow/1](http://works.bepress.com/adam_chodorow/1).
17. Benjamin Tyson Duranske, VIRTUAL LAW 14–15 (2008). For examples of the types of problems that could arise, see Stephanie Francis Ward, *Fantasy Life, Real Law*, A.B.A. J., Mar. 2007, at 42, 43–45; Attila Berry, *Lawyers Find Real Revenue in Virtual World*, Law.com, July 31, 2007, <http://www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=900005556541>.
18. SL Bar Association, <http://www.slba.info> (last visited Aug. 7, 2008).
19. SL Bar Association, Speaker Series, <http://slba.info/speakerseries.html> (last visited Aug. 7, 2008). See also, Second Life: Get CLE Credit in Your Underwear, Posting of Petra Pasternak to Legal Pad, [http://legalpad.typepad.com/my\\_weblog/2008/07/second-life-get.html](http://legalpad.typepad.com/my_weblog/2008/07/second-life-get.html) (July 15, 2008).
20. See Second Life Wiki, Orientation Island, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Orientation\\_Island\\_Walk\\_Through](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Orientation_Island_Walk_Through) (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).
21. See Second Life Wiki, Help Island, [http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Help\\_Island](http://wiki.secondlife.com/wiki/Help_Island) (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).
22. The wiki for the workshop is Law Librarians in Virtual Worlds, <http://vwlawlibrarians.wetpaint.com> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).
23. Catherine “Kate” Fitz is Public Services Librarian at Sacramento County Law Library. As avatar Cat Galileo, she built and maintains the Lawspot Library, focusing on the law of virtual worlds. Lawspot: Virtual Worlds Law Library, About, [www.lawspotonline.com](http://www.lawspotonline.com) (last visited Aug. 6, 2008). The Lawspot library is available in Second Life and on the Web at <http://www.lawspotonline.com/lawspot/index.jsp> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

in preparation for class. In class we began work on an activity that needed to be completed before the next class.<sup>24</sup>

¶9 The workshop continues through August 27, during which time we will develop a “resource, exhibit, or program for display or presentation in the Second Life Law Library.”<sup>25</sup> Our open house is scheduled for August 21.<sup>26</sup> There will be a closing webinar to “report on participants’ projects, usage statistics, and lessons learned, and present conclusions about the usefulness of Second Life to law librarians.”<sup>27</sup>

¶10 As I write this column, I am a little more than halfway through the workshop, and I finally feel competent to use Second Life to support law school or law library activities. The workshop material has been presented in a variety of formats, including something for most learning preferences: visual, read/write, and kinesthetic. This combination has enabled me to use a multimodal strategy that works with my learning preferences. I credit the design of this workshop with making it possible for me to learn what I had struggled so long to teach myself.

### Learning Styles

¶11 Why am I telling you so much about a workshop that will be over by the time you read this? In part because I hope that you will someday have a chance to participate in a workshop like this and that you will take advantage of the opportunity. But also because I think that my experience with Second Life and the Virtual World Law Librarianship Workshop demonstrates the value of thinking about our own learning styles.

### VARK

¶12 There are a number of methods for describing and identifying learning styles or preferences. I recently learned about the VARK questionnaire.<sup>28</sup> VARK stands for Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic, the four learning preferences used in the questionnaire.<sup>29</sup> The questionnaire consists of sixteen multiple-choice questions<sup>30</sup> and is free for use “by teachers, professors and tutors in colleges, uni-

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24. See Law Librarians in Virtual Worlds, Assignments, <http://vwlawlibrarians.wetpaint.com/page/Assignments> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

25. Law Librarians in Virtual Worlds, About the Workshop, <http://vwlawlibrarians.wetpaint.com/page/About+the+Workshop> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

26. Law Librarians in Virtual Worlds, Individual Projects, <http://vwlawlibrarians.wetpaint.com/page/Individual+Projects> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

27. About the Workshop, *supra* note 25.

28. VARK, The VARK Questionnaire, <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=questionnaire> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

29. VARK, The VARK Categories, <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=categories> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

30. VARK, *supra* note 28.

versities and high schools.”<sup>31</sup> The VARK web site also has recommended study strategies for visual, aural, read/write, kinesthetic, and multimodal learners.<sup>32</sup>

¶13 At this summer’s CALI Conference for Law School Computing,<sup>33</sup> I attended a program on VARK and Law Student Learning Styles.<sup>34</sup> The speaker at the CALI program on VARK was Debra R. Cohen, who is in charge of first-year orientation and the academic success program at the Southern New England School of Law. Professor Cohen requires all students participating in orientation to complete the VARK questionnaire, and she uses the questionnaires to help students who are having grade trouble. She also takes the questionnaire herself every year.<sup>35</sup>

¶14 As part of the program, we completed and scored the VARK questionnaire. I wasn’t surprised that my scores showed I was a multimodal learner (I learn better when material is presented in a variety of formats) but I was surprised that my strongest learning preference was the read/write mode.

¶15 And then it clicked. I understood why I had had so many problems learning to use Second Life and why I was finally able to learn it in the workshop. At the time I started trying to teach myself to use Second Life, no books had been published on how to use it, and I had difficulty finding online documentation that answered my questions. Also, I didn’t know how strong my read/write learning preference was, and I didn’t know enough about learning strategies to compensate for the shortage of reading materials.

¶16 In the Virtual World Law Librarianship Workshop, our instructor, Kate Fitz, presents the material in a variety of ways. She identifies readings that addressed exactly what we need to learn that week, which is very helpful for those of us with a read/write learning preference. The weekly sessions held in Second Life are also good for read/write learners, because the presentations are done via text chat, and transcripts are available after the class. The in-world sessions include demonstrations and practice activities, which are good for the visual, kinesthetic, and multimodal learners.

¶17 There is one other aspect to the workshop that I have found to be especially beneficial, although I’m not sure which learning preferences it helps. During our weekly sessions in Second Life, we are able to practice what we have learned while the instructor is available to answer questions, which is very helpful. But we are

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31. VARK, Copyright Information, <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=copyright> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

32. VARK, The VARK Helpsheets: Study Practices Keyed to VARK Preferences, <http://www.vark-learn.com/english/page.asp?p=helpsheets> (last visited Aug. 7, 2008).

33. See CALI, 2008 Conference for Law School Computing, <http://www2.cali.org/index.php?fuseaction=conference.home> (last visited Aug. 6, 2008).

34. Debra R. Cohen, VARK and Law Student Learning Styles, program presented at the 2008 Conference for Law School Computing, Baltimore, Md. (June 19, 2008), available at <http://wiki.cali.org/calicon08/index.php?n=Sessions.400>.

35. *Id.*

also sharing what we learned with our fellow students<sup>36</sup> and learning from each other's mistakes, which enabled us to learn more in each session than we would have learned on our own. Also, I find it very encouraging to see smart people working to overcome the same learning curve I struggled with.

¶18 Professor Cohen said that having students complete the questionnaire helps them to think about thinking and learning. Awareness of learning styles also helps teachers think about teaching. Professor Cohen recommended that, in addition to taking the VARK questionnaire themselves, professors do the reading, go to a class, and take notes in an area they are not familiar with.<sup>37</sup> Learning something unfamiliar can help you understand your own learning and teaching styles. It may also make you more aware of the learning styles of others.

### Conclusion

¶19 When you finally conquer something you have struggled to learn, it feels great! And there are so many opportunities to learn something new that it would be a shame not to take advantage of some of them. I recommend that you complete the VARK questionnaire to get an idea of your learning preferences and check out the recommended study strategies. Then, when you see an opportunity to learn something interesting outside your area of expertise, give it a try and apply what you know about your learning preferences. You won't regret it.

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36. Some people in the workshop were more accomplished than others. Liz Glankler, Web & Technology Services Librarian, Saint Louis University Omer Poos Law Library, who is Tink Rang in Second Life, deserves special mention. Even though she was quite accomplished at most of what we learned, she came to every class and helped many of us both during and outside of class.

37. Cohen, *supra* note 34.