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# The best way to learn is by doing

In this Instructable I am going to be going over 3 techniques to help improve your learning. What I will be going through will be helpful during both your formal education, and throughout your life. The 3 things I will be going over are: A: Focused and Diffuse Modes of Thinking B: How Memory Works C: Preventing Procrastination

The first, and most important thing to understand about how you learn are the 2 different modes that your brain uses when learning. They are the Focused and Diffuse modes. The Focused mode is what many people think learning "is" it's when you are intently focuses on a problem, trying to find the solution. When using the focused mode, your brain makes quick and similar attempts at solving the problem. As you can see in the image, it can be compared to a pinball machine with bumpers that are very close together. The focused mode is often used when your brain already had an ingrained mental path, on how to solve a particular problem; as can be seen by the black path on the focused mode image. The Diffuse mode on the other hand, is useful when you are working on a problem you have never seen before, or are having trouble understanding. When you are using the diffuse mode of thinking your brain can jump from idea to idea, concept to concept. The diffuse mode of thinking is something that many people have trouble using effectively. The best way to use the diffuse mode of thinking to help you solve a difficult problem is to go do something else for a while that isn't to mentally taxing, such as going for a walk or a drive. Another time your brain naturally falls into the diffuse mode of thinking is when you are sleeping. Because of this it can be helpful to look at the problem you are working on right before you go to bed for the night. You will often find that you will wake up with a whole new way to look at the problem! Effective learning takes advantage of both modes of learning, by going as far as you can in the focused mode, and when you get stuck, dropping into the diffuse mode to help you change the way you are looking at the problem, then back to the focused mode.

How Memory Works is a vast topic with tons of information available, I am going to touch on one of the most common mistakes people make about their memory, and what can be done to improve it. A common misconception about memory is that the more times you do something the better you remember it. While this is true to a point, just repeating the same thing over and over again, whether it be reading a chapter in a text book, solving practice problems, or watching a lecture again and again. Actually isn't to helpful, what really helps is something called Spaced Repetition. Spaced Repetition is a memorization technique where you spend a short amount of time memorizing something every day, instead of a longer period of time once. This has been proven to help lock the memory in your brain. Remember the black line from the focused mode of thinking in the last step that represented a memory, or neural pattern, that was so ingrained that you need little to no effort to complete it. That is what spaced repetition can help you get. The most common reason that people end-up cramming, and trying to do all their memorization in one sitting is Procrastination. In the next step I am going to be talking about how you can avoid Procrastination with a simple trick. Procrastination is one of the largest preventing factors in most peoples learning. Many people try, and fail, to prevent procrastination through willpower alone. Although some willpower is necessary, there is a method that makes it much easier. It's called the Pomodoro technique. It involves using 25 minute focused study sessions, with 5 minute brakes in-between. To use this technique you first have to remove as many distractions as possible, the most important distractions to remove are the ones that normally cause you to procrastinate. This is different for everyone, but a few common ones are: Facebook, web-surfing, email and texting. Removing these distractions will likely mean turning off your cellphone, disabling the internet (unless you need it for your work) and finding a quiet space to work where there are as few distractions around you as possible. Once you are ready to go, set a timer for 25 minutes and work on the task until the timer rings. The take a sort break (no longer then 5 minutes) and work for another 25 minutes. After you have completed 4 Pomodoros, take a longer break (no longer then 30 minutes.)

During these brakes it can be helpful to try to access your defuse mode of thinking, especially if you are struggling through a difficult problem. So try taking a quick walk, or whatever method works best for you. In this Instructable, I have covered the 3 main aspects of learning how to learn that I found most helpful for myself in my own learning. There is a wealth of other information available, if you are interested in learning more, I would recommend this book: as... And the accompanying FREE online course: Pomodoro (Tomato Timer) image: il\_pomodoro.jpg All other images credit to: Learning How to Learn: Powerful mental tools to help you master tough subjects by Dr. Barbara Oakley, Dr. Terrence Sejnowski, an online course offered through Coursera.

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