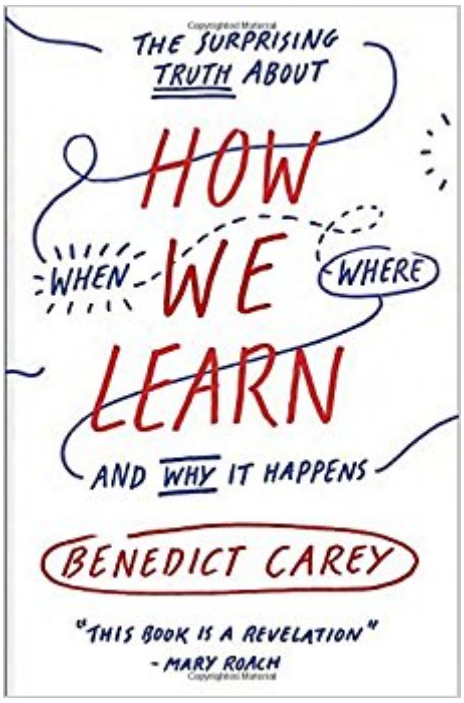
How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, And Why It Happens



Synopsis

In the tradition of The Power of Habit and Thinking, Fast and Slow comes a practical, playful, and endlessly fascinating guide to what we really know about learning and memory todayâ ”and how we can apply it to our own lives. Â From an early age, it is drilled into our heads: Restlessness, distraction, and ignorance are the enemies of success. Weâ ™re told that learning is all self-discipline, that we must confine ourselves to designated study areas, turn off the music, and maintain a strict ritual if we want to ace that test, memorize that presentation, or nail that piano recital. Â But what if almost everything we were told about learning is wrong?Â And what if there was a way to achieve more with less effort? Â In How We Learn, award-winning science reporter Benedict Carey sifts through decades of education research and landmark studies to uncover the truth about how our brains absorb and retain information. What he discovers is that, from the moment we are born, we are all learning quickly, efficiently, and automatically; but in our zeal to systematize the process we have ignored valuable, naturally enjoyable learning tools like forgetting, sleeping, and daydreaming. Is a dedicated desk in a quiet room really the best way to study? Can altering your routine improve your recall? Are there times when distraction is good? Is repetition necessary? Careyâ ™s search for answers to these questions yields a wealth of strategies that make learning more a part of our everyday livesâ ”and less of a chore. Â By road testing many of the counterintuitive techniques described in this book, Carey shows how we can flex the neural muscles that make deep learning possible. Along the way he reveals why teachers should give final exams on the first day of class, why itâ ™s wise to interleave subjects and concepts when learning any new skill, and when itâ ™s smarter to stay up late prepping for that presentation than to rise early for one last cram session. And if this requires some suspension of disbelief, thatâ ™s because the research defies what weâ ™ve been told, throughout our lives, about how best to learn. Â The brain is not like a muscle, at least not in any straightforward sense. It is something else altogether, sensitive to mood, to timing, to circadian rhythms, as well as to location and environment. It doesnâ ™t take orders well, to put it mildly. If the brain is a learning machine, then it is an eccentric one. In How We Learn, Benedict CareyÂ shows us how to exploit its quirks to our advantage. Â Praise for How We Learnâ œThis book is a revelation. I feel as if Iâ ™ve owned a brain for fifty-four years and only now discovered the operating manual.â •â ”Mary Roach, bestselling author of Stiff and Gulpâ œA welcome rejoinder to the faddish notion that learning is all about the hours put in.â •â ”The New York Times Book Review Â â œA valuable, entertaining tool for educators, students and parents.â •â ”Shelf Awareness Â â œHow We Learn is more than a new approach to learning; it is a guide to making the most out of life. Who wouldnâ ™t be interested in

that?â •â ”Scientific American Â â œI know of no other source that pulls together so much of what we know about the science of memory and couples it with practical, practicable advice.â •â ”Daniel T. Willingham, professor of psychology at the University of VirginiaFrom the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

I keep up fairly well with research in the field of psychology and learning in particular, so much of this information was not entirely new and surprising to me, but Benedict Carey does a great job of pulling a lot of different research together and presenting it a practical way. This is more a guide to what is known than a self-help book, but it will definitely be of use both to teachers and students who want to understand how to study more effectively.A couple of take-aways--half-forgetting and then re-learning, especially by trying to remember, make the thing you are trying to learn really stick. So as a teacher, when I start class on Monday and ask students to recall what it was we were working on last Friday, that is not just review--that is learning. It would be best, I suppose, if instead of asking the whole class and letting one or two students do the hard work, I had everyone try their best to write down what the remember about passive voice or the subjunctive.That brings up another great point that he makes--that testing, quizzing, and self-testing are highly effective ways not of evaluating but of actually learning. This helps to overcome what he calls the Fluency Illusion, and what I have long called the "smile-and-nod" level of understanding. IN other words, when the teacher is doing math problems on the board and you are watching, you understand--you smile and nod and think, ok, yeah, sure, I get it. It is only when the tables are turned and the teacher says, Ok,

now you try it, that the gaps in understanding are revealed.So if you are studying for a test on state capitals, let's say, and you see Georgia: Atlanta, you think right, sure. But it's not until someone says Georgia and you can say Atlanta that you actually know it. And each time you test yourself, or have someone else test you, you are retrieving and then re-storing that memory, making it more salient. I would go so far as to suggest that one difference between middle-class kids and poor kids in school is that middle-class parents often quiz their kids on their school-work. "Let's go over those state capitals together," and less-educated parents probably don't. That could be enough to make a big difference, since this is such a powerful learning tool.He also reports on interesting work on how location and distraction can help rather than hurt our learning--studying in a variety of places, with varying amounts of distraction can help us remember more. And spaced practice works better than intense practice. IN other words, if you have one hour to learn the capitals of all the countries in Europe, or the parts of the hand, it would be better to do 3 20-minute sessions, especially if you sleep between at least two of the sessions, than to do all 60 minutes at once. And what about cramming? We don't really need research to tell us this, but yes, it works if your only goal is to pass the test, but if you actually want to learn the material, it is worthless. You forget it as fast as you "learned" it.One great point to this book is that he covers widely diverse fields of study--from physical skills like a golf swing or a tennis serve, to complex skills like flying a plane, to rote memorization, such as vocabulary or state capitals., to comprehension of difficult concepts like economics or physics. Many of the techniques he describes apply across the board, and others are more particular to certain types of learning. For example, for physical performance (a piano recital or a baseball tryout, you do better if you sleep in a bit, getting plenty of the kind of sleep that occurs towards morning. For memory like a vocabulary test, it's better to get plenty of the early-stage sleep, so go to bed on time and get up early in the morning to review. Your brain does a lot of memory consolidation while you sleep, and specific types in specific stages.One point that he doesn't directly address but that I am familiar with the research on is whether it's better to memorize large things as a whole or in chunks. For example, if you are an actor, or you want to memorize a long poem or speech, should you work on the first sentence, and then the second sentence, and so on, or should you go through the whole thing each time. The answer is that you should do it whole--it will feel like you're not getting anywhere at first, but suddenly, the whole thing will be in there This fits with what he says about inter-leaving---practicing a variety of different things in each session rather than chunking it all together--master skill A before moving on to skill B. No, it's better to do some A, some B, and some C, even though it will feel like you aren't making progress at first.I recommend this book to every teacher of any subject, and to anyone who is a student at any level, and to parents,

who worry that their kids are too distracted and unfocused in the way they study--turns out that distraction and lack of focus can serve you well!

Benedict Carey’s "How We Learn" is focused on the process of enhancing and exercising our memories in order to achieve positive results in memorization. He goes in depth in helping his readers enhance their memories through several techniques, in order to register, store and retrieve information. Most of us are not aware that our brains are capable of so much, but Benedict Carey makes the process look easy. Some of his techniques range from beginners techniques, to more advanced. I pretty much have the beginners techniques down pact; I would like to divulge into the more advanced techniques, as enhancing my memory has become a number one priority in my life.Repetition, according to Benedict, is a vital part in helping us to enhance the memory. We must train our brains, in a way, so that certain things we may forget become more and more routine to us. For example, I sometimes forget to lock all the doors in my house before going to sleep. If I am aware of this and practice locking the doors each and every night, soon enough it will become routine to me and I’ll no longer forget to do it.I read this book, in conjunction with Greg Frosts book, "Maximizing Brain Control : Unleash The Genius In You", and I’m starting to feel more confident and knowledgeable in learning about the human brain and how to store and retrieve information. Both are excellent resources and combined, can truly work wonders for you if you take them serious and truly want to enhance your brain capacity.Good Habits is a key technique both books teach. If you can associate certain things with something you are more familiar with, you are more likely to start remembering as time goes on. Problem Solving is a third technique in which Benedict explains. If you can train your brain to solve the problem that need to be completed, we also learn the upside of distraction.He also provides dietary advice that can help to improve our memory. Most of us would not think or believe that sleep actually plays a vital role in our brain function and memorization, but it does. Something as simple as making small changes in our lifestyle can actually enhance our memories.

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