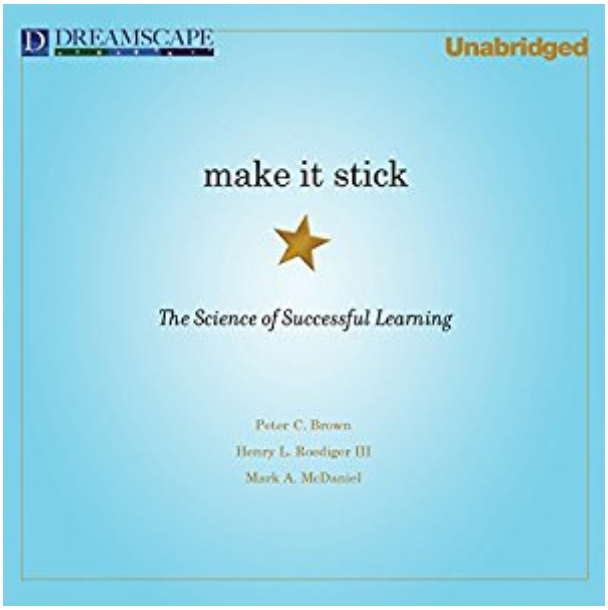
Make It Stick: The Science Of Successful Learning



Synopsis

To most of us, learning something "the hard way" implies wasted time and effort. Good teaching, we believe, should be creatively tailored to the different learning styles of students and should use strategies that make learning easier. Make It Stick turns fashionable ideas like these on their head. Many common study habits and practice routines turn out to be counterproductive. Underlining and highlighting, rereading, cramming, and single-minded repetition of new skills create the illusion of mastery, but gains fade quickly. More complex and learning come from self-testing, introducing certain difficulties in practice, waiting to re-study new material until a little forgetting has set in, and interleaving the practice of one skill or topic with another. Speaking most urgently to students, teachers, trainers, and athletes, Make It Stick will appeal to all those interested in the challenge of lifelong learning and self-improvement.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition
Listening Length: 8 hoursÂ andÂ 34 minutes
Program Type: Audiobook
Version: Unabridged
Publisher: Dreamscape Media, LLC
Audible.com Release Date: July 23, 2014
Whispersync for Voice: Ready
Language: English
ASIN: B00M1Z2THY
Best Sellers Rank: #4 inÂ Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Education #6 inÂ Books > Education & Teaching > Studying & Workbooks > Study Skills #6 inÂ Books > Education & Teaching > Schools & Teaching > Education Theory > Educational Psychology

Customer Reviews

Okay, well maybe I am overstating that a little. But the main "thesis" of Peter Brown’s book - aside from being a summary of what cognitive science data shows about how we learn - is basically that many of the things we often assume about learning are wrong. Here are some of them: we learn best by reading and rereading a passage until we really understand it. WRONG! We learn best when we isolate a skill and practice it over and over again. WRONG! We all have learning styles that are the way we learn best. WRONG! IQ (or something like it) imposes relatively firm limits on how much information we can absorb. WRONG!In this pretty easy-reading book, Peter Brown

summarizes some of the latest findings in cognitive science, and many of these findings contradict what is often assumed about learning. First, many k-12 and college students are taught to (and do) use the 'reread and highlight' method to try and absorb content. Well, while this works to an extent, it leads more to an illusion of mastery than mastery. What works better? Read the content and quiz yourself; information retrieval is the key. Retrieving helps to build stronger connections in the brain that will lock information into memory. What's more - and this is another chapter - the harder the retrieval, the stronger your retention of what is retrieved. (So, writing a short essay recalling the concepts works better than true/false and multiple choice recall.)Another myth? While we all certainly have learning preferences (I like to receive my information in written form), that doesn't mean we learn best when receiving information in that form (I can do as well when I receive information audibly as when it is written, even though I prefer the latter).

Is there anything new in this book? I believe there is sage advice in it for many of us.That our brains adapt is good but also bad for studying. We become bored.For many of us, we were never taught how our minds work and how we should leverage its natural processes to learn. Sometimes, practice or studying feels painfully slow and we often switch to another method that feels good. Unfortunately, we often fail at assessing how much we're learning and have actually learned.Some students were never taught how to learn, and had few, if any, good teachers/mentors.Some teachers were never taught how to teach, and have forgotten what it was like to be a student.This book is for those both groups. The examples and advice for teachers and corporate trainers is also well written and useful.If you have had good teachers or learning examplars, you might find this book less valuable than will most people.SUMMARY:PROs: This book will show you how to structure your learning and assessment processes to learn and confirm you're actually retaining the material. It provides 27 pages of endnotes on scientific studies that support its recommendations. Having read and applied the principles of both MIS and WSSK (see below), I can say they do work, very well.CONs: Be prepared to look for what you want. Most of us will focus on the prescriptions of Chapter 8: e.g. avoid rereading as a primary study method, and do use the blank paper assessment test, etc..

Summary of the key concepts in the book:Conventional Wisdom: Make learning easyBest practice: Design learning with desirable difficultiesDiscussion: â œLearning is deeper and more durable when it is effortful.â • â œDifficulties that elicit more effort and that slow down learningâ | will more than compensate for their inconvenience by making the learning stronger, more precise, and more

enduring. Short-term impediments that make for stronger learning have come to be called desirable difficulties.â • â œDonâ ™t assume you are doing something wrong if the learning feels hard.â • â œNot all difficulties in learning are desirable ones. Anxiety while taking a test seems to represent an undesirable difficulty.â • Slow down to find meaning. Always read prior to the lecture. â œTraining has to be engaging in order to hold employeesâ ™ attention.â •Conventional Wisdom: Concentrate on one topic at a time (aka. massed practice)Best practice: Interleave different but related topicsDiscussion: â œLearning from interleaved practice feels slower than learning from massed practice.â • While interleaving can impede performance during initial learning (tests taken immediately after exposure), interleaving has been show to boost â œfinal test performance by a remarkable 215 percent.â • In addition, â œcommonalitiesâ | learned through massed practice proved less useful than the differences â | learned through interleaving.â • â œIn interleaving, you donâ ™t move from a complete practice set of one topic to go to another. You switch before each practice is completeâ | You need to shuffle your flashcards.

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