30. Practice Activity: Right, Wrong, Right

One way to burn understanding into your brain, particularly a skill, is to find someone who does it well. It might be your teacher or a fellow student, someone in your class or someone in the year above. Find an example of them doing it right. It might be a complex mathematical problem worked through, a definition and example question in social science, a perfect paragraph or a calculation in chemistry or physics.

Once you've got the example, you can do the following activity. We've found it works well at helping students see the difference between a successful answer and unsuccessful answer by making you focus on the differences between wrong and right.

The principle is very simple. It goes like this:

1 Using your example, copy the skill. You must do it right. It might be that you write a paragraph that borrows the best bits from the example you've got, or you might solve a very similar mathematical problem following your example.

2 Then do it wrong. Do it the way you've been doing it. Examine the differences. Where exactly do you go wrong? What is the result of that error? Where does it lead? How does wrong look different?

3 Then copy the skill right again.

You go – right, wrong, right. The two rights start to burn the understanding into your brain. The wrong in the middle helps you see why the wrong is wrong.

Isolating the Errors

It's worth spending some time looking at the differences between the two rights and the wrong. Try to make a list of three or four things that the right is doing that the wrong wasn't. Make a note of them here:

Final Thoughts

A simple way to summarise your learning here is to record:

» Something you need to do more of. (More regular quotation? More academic terminology? More references to studies? More evaluation of sources? More careful checking of calculations?)

» And something you need to do less of. (The opposite of the suggestions above.)

More of:

Less of: