

# Three Tales for a curious mind



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First edition.

First published on GitHub:

<https://github.com/Chhangsreng-prum/Three-Tales-for-a-curious-mind>

## Preface

I originally wrote these stories for my girlfriend, my family, and a few close friends – people I care about deeply.

Some of them have been burned by the school system. For them, the word “study” brings up stress, failure, and rejection – not curiosity or growth. I don’t blame them. When the education system makes people feel like they’ve been left behind, it’s easy to rationalize studying as a painful chore with diminishing returns.

So I decided to try something different.

Rather than handing them a book titled “Study Techniques You Should Try,” – which they’d probably never open – I wrote a set of fictional stories. Stories that quietly introduce powerful study techniques like spaced repetition, deliberate practice, and the difference between focused and diffuse mode. Not through lectures, but through metaphors, characters, and moments.

If they enjoy the stories, maybe – just maybe – they’ll absorb the deeper ideas behind them. And if not? At least they’ll have read something beautiful and gentle.

At the end of each story, I've included a short reflection explaining the learning principle that inspired it. You can read those too, or skip them entirely. That part's up to you.

At first, it was just plain text, but later on, I decided to add visuals because I realized I wanted to dedicate this book to my future children as well. I shaped each scene with care, adding extra character and expanding the story. I spent a lot of time on the details. I don't have kids yet, but when I do, I want to show them this book.

— Prum

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# Two brothers:

## Focusia & Defusia



In a warm, cozy home. Focusia and Diffusia are brothers. Focusia, being the older brother, is serious and reliable. Diffusia, on the other hand, loves to play and mess around. He especially enjoys playing with the toys that Focusia brings him, but he only plays when Focusia is looking away or asleep.



One day, Focusia and Diffusia found themselves deep inside an ancient, overgrown temple. The world, at this point, had been infested with a zombie virus. This virus affected not just humans but also animals like dogs, cats, mice, and more.

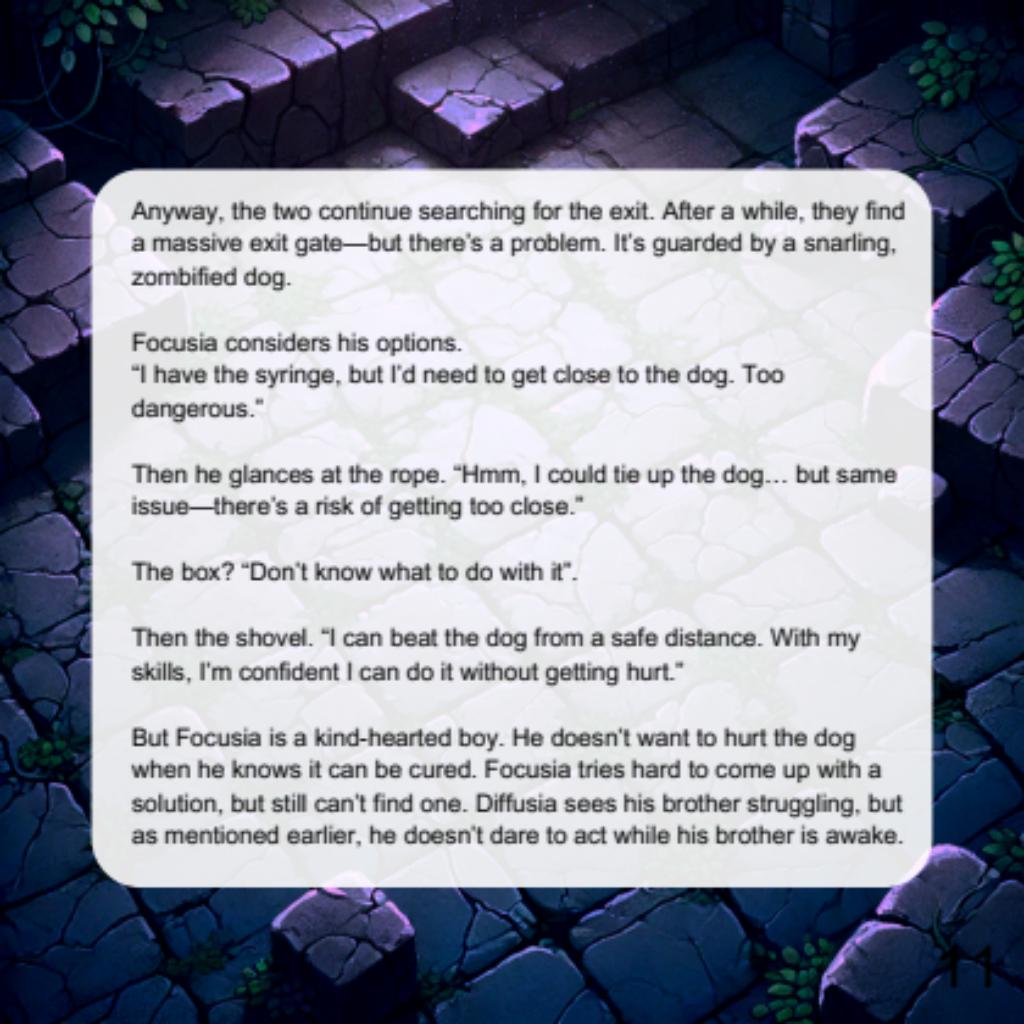


As always, Focusia, being the reliable brother, led the way in trying to find a way out. Diffusia followed along from behind.

As they walked, they came across a map with an X marked on it. Focusia decided to follow where the X led. When they arrived, they found a patch of dirt next to a shovel. Focusia dug and found a box tied with rope.



Inside the box were several syringes—these were the cure for the zombie virus. Focusia figured this could be useful, so he gathered up the syringes. He brought the box, the rope, and the shovel along as well because he knows that his brother loved to mess around with random things



Anyway, the two continue searching for the exit. After a while, they find a massive exit gate—but there's a problem. It's guarded by a snarling, zombified dog.

Focusia considers his options.

"I have the syringe, but I'd need to get close to the dog. Too dangerous."

Then he glances at the rope. "Hmm, I could tie up the dog... but same issue—there's a risk of getting too close."

The box? "Don't know what to do with it".

Then the shovel. "I can beat the dog from a safe distance. With my skills, I'm confident I can do it without getting hurt."

But Focusia is a kind-hearted boy. He doesn't want to hurt the dog when he knows it can be cured. Focusia tries hard to come up with a solution, but still can't find one. Diffusia sees his brother struggling, but as mentioned earlier, he doesn't dare to act while his brother is awake.

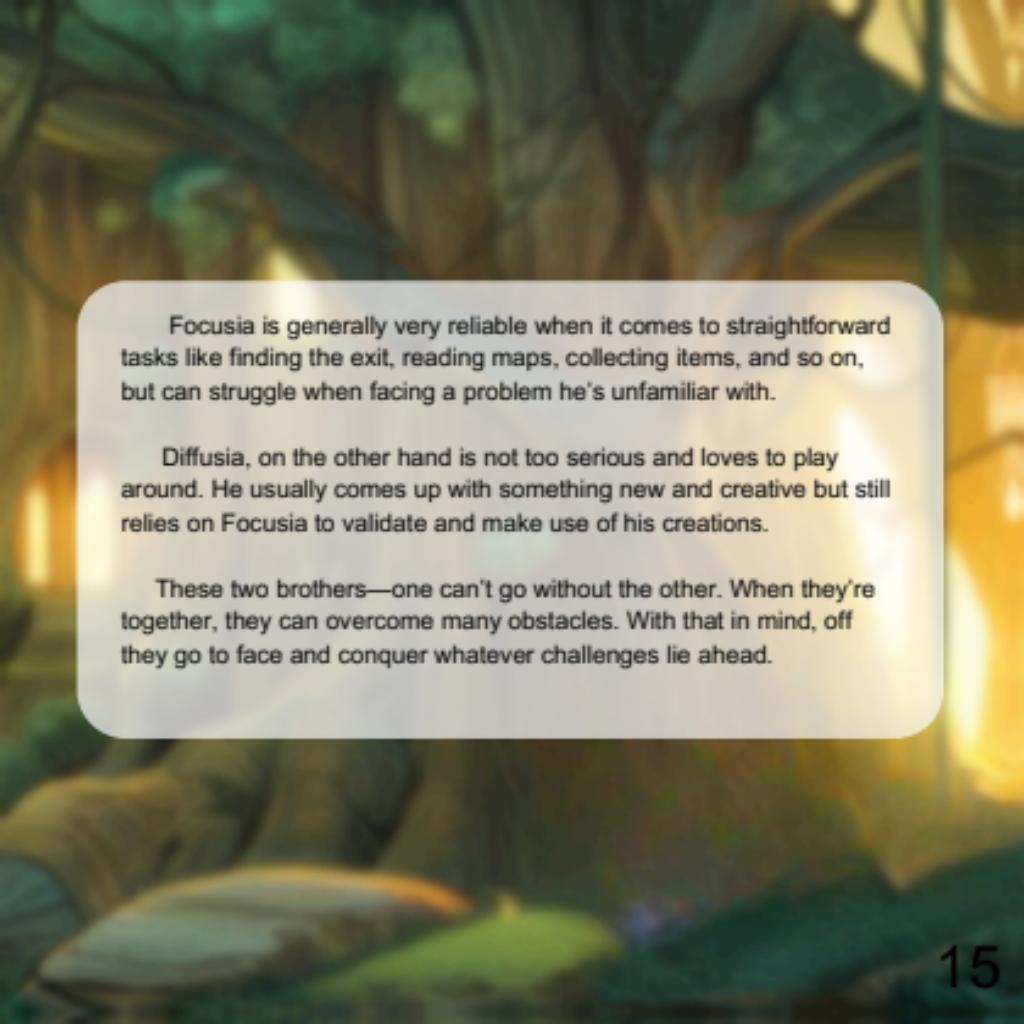


Focusia then got tired and decided to retreat a bit and take a short nap. Once he had fallen asleep, Diffusia came to play with all the items. He liked to mix up the stuff that Focusia had brought back—he attached the syringe to the shovel, then tied it using the rope, and kept playing around with it.





After a while, Focusia woke up. He decided to look at the items and found the syringe-spear that Diffusia had made. "What a genius idea," Focusia impressed. He took the spear and jabbed the dog from a safe distance. The medicine took effect—the dog stopped snarling and was now cured. It no longer tried to bite the two brothers. Focusia and Diffusia successfully left the temple, and even made a new companion



Focusia is generally very reliable when it comes to straightforward tasks like finding the exit, reading maps, collecting items, and so on, but can struggle when facing a problem he's unfamiliar with.

Diffusia, on the other hand is not too serious and loves to play around. He usually comes up with something new and creative but still relies on Focusia to validate and make use of his creations.

These two brothers—one can't go without the other. When they're together, they can overcome many obstacles. With that in mind, off they go to face and conquer whatever challenges lie ahead.

*The end ...*



## Introduction to Focus mode and Diffuse Mode

Now pause for a second and ponder: "If Focusia and Diffusia were to merge into a single person, who would that be?"

The answer is simple—it would be you. Yes, YOU.

Most people know they can be like Focusia when they're serious about learning. That sharp, focused version of themselves when learning something. But what many don't realize is that we also have Diffusia inside us — and he only comes out to play when we stop focusing or even fall asleep(Just like Diffusia who only plays when Focusia looks away or is asleep).

We all have two modes of learning: **Focus Mode and Diffuse Mode**.

Focus Mode is when we're actively concentrating, like when Focusia is wide awake, laser-focused on the task. But once we take a break, go for a walk, or sleep. Diffuse mode finally kicks in, just like Diffusia finally comes out to play.

Diffusia doesn't just play around aimlessly. He takes all the information we gave him during Focus Mode, mixes it up, reorganizes it, and sometimes even finds new, creative ways to solve problems. The neat part is? You don't even need to think about it. It's all happening in the background.

So next time you're stuck on a math problem or can't figure something out, don't just keep forcing it. Take a break. Let your mind wander. When you come back, you might be surprised that the problem suddenly makes more sense, or you might notice something you hadn't before.

The takeaway? You've got both Focusia and Diffusia inside you, and they both are eager to help you learn. Don't waste their potential by only using one of them. Focus

Mode helps you absorb information. Diffuse Mode helps you process and connect it in the background. The best part? Diffuse Mode requires almost no effort, you don't even need to think about it. Thus, don't feel guilty about taking breaks. You're not wasting time. You're giving Diffusia a chance to work his magic. Relaxing isn't just idling or wasting time; it's actually learning but behind the scenes. Literally.

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# Deli the duck

## Road to Mastery

By: Chhangsreng Prum



In the year 3000, humanity had abandoned Earth in search of a new home. Ducks had evolved and taken over the planet.







In a small town on this duck-filled world, lived Deli — a good, honest little duck who dreamed of becoming a **great car repairman**.

From a young age, Deli learned how to polish windshields. He quickly became hooked. There was something satisfying about turning a dusty, smudged surface into a crystal-clear pane. He did it so well, you could barely tell the glass was there at all.



One day, a car bumped into a tree nearby. In this duck world, cars moved slowly, so the grandpa duck driving it was fine. He complained about having trouble seeing.

Deli noticed the scratched-up windshield and offered to help. He brought the car into his small garage and polished the windshield with care. When he was done, the glass was so clean it sparkled.

The old duck was amazed. Though Deli had offered to do it for free, the old man insisted on paying him a respectable amount.



Deli beamed with pride. It was the first time he had served a customer on his own. "I'm a great car repairman now," he whispered to himself.

**Years passed**

One stormy afternoon, the same old grandpa bumped into the same tree again and made the same complaint:  
"I'm having trouble seeing.".

Deli offered to help once more.



But this time, the windshield wasn't badly scratched. It was mostly still in good shape. Deli turned on the headlights and noticed something: the lights were dimmer than they should be. That could be the reason the old duck couldn't see well.

But there was a problem. When Deli was young, he had accidentally stepped on a frayed wire and been badly hurted. Since then, he had developed a deep fear of anything electrical — especially wiring.



Out of fear, Deli convinced himself that if he just polished the windshield perfectly, the old duck would be able to see clearly anyway. So, he polished it to crystal clarity once again. The grandpa thanked him, paid him, and drove off.

**Two days later...**

The old duck drove right into Deli's shop wall. Though he could see slightly better, he admitted it was still too hard to drive safely.



Deli couldn't ignore it any longer. He swallowed his pride and fear, and asked his father for help.

His dad came in, calm and confident, and showed him how to safely handle electrical wiring. He demonstrated how to fix the left headlight. Then Deli, still nervous, took a deep breath and fixed the right one.



Together, they brought the lights back to full brightness. The old duck, glowing with gratitude, can now drive safely again.

# DELI'S AUTO SHOP

As time passed, more and more ducks brought their cars to Deli's auto shop. He no longer just polished windshields – he could now fix headlights, taillights, and all sorts of electrical issues. People praised his skills.



And before he knew it, Deli had become what he always dreamed of: To become a great car repairman.



One evening, as he locked up the shop, Deli thought back to his younger self, and he realized something:

"You don't get good by doing what's easy. You get good by doing what's hard. True mastery only comes when you face the things you fear – fear is not above your reach, it is yours to conquer."

With this mindset, Deli kept honing his skills, never running from a challenge again. Eventually, his little auto shop became the most renowned in town.

The end

## Introduction to “Deliberate Practice”

Whether it's becoming a car repairman, learning a difficult math topic, or mastering any skill, true mastery comes from deliberately working on harder problems, not from repeating things you've already mastered. Sure, it feels good to ace an easy problem, but you're not really learning anything new. A problem seems hard because you can't solve it, and the reason you can't solve it is because it involves something you're not yet familiar with – some new concept or technique. By tackling harder problems, you expose yourself to those new elements and techniques. Once you've mastered most of them, only then you can confidently say you've truly mastered the material.

Just like Deli, even though he felt confident after the old man praised him for the windshield, it was just an illusion of competence. He wasn't yet a great repairman, he's only good at an easy subset of what an actual car repairman does. Thus ended up putting his customers at risk. It wasn't until he mastered wiring, along with other key aspects of car repair, that he actually became a real expert.

The takeaway is this: don't stop after getting good at the easy parts. Being able to solve simple problems gives the illusion of competence, not the real thing. If you want to grow, you need to keep pushing yourself by choosing harder problems. This is called “**Deliberate Practice**”.

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# Space at university

(Got Lost and Found More)

By: Chhangsreng Prum





Space is a 22-year-old woodcutter from a quiet village. One day, he decided to pursue a university education, to learn, grow, and expand his career. A scholarship to study in a distant city was awarded to him.

He contacted his uncle in the city, who was more than happy to help. Then, he packed his belongings, said goodbye to everyone, and hopped into a car—ready to face an entirely new experience.

His uncle asked, "How do you feel about starting university?"

"Very excited to deepen my knowledge and make new friends." Space replied.

"That's great," his uncle said with a smile,

but in his mind, he thought, "This guy has no idea what he's signing up for. It's going to be hellish—at least, it was for me."



It was late August, and his university life was about to begin. He enrolled in various subjects, two of which were Math and Physics. Each subject had four sessions per week: Lecture, Tutorial, Workshop, Office hour.



As he examined his timetable, Space noticed something interesting. For his Math class, the four sessions were **spread** across the week—Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday.

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
8:00 AM							
9:00 AM	Math			Math		Physic	
10:00 AM							
11:00 AM						Physic	
1:00 PM						Math	
2:00 PM		Math				Physic	
3:00 PM							
4:00 PM						Physic	

Physics on the other hand, all four sessions were **crammed** into Saturday, but he didn't think much of it.

# Week 1

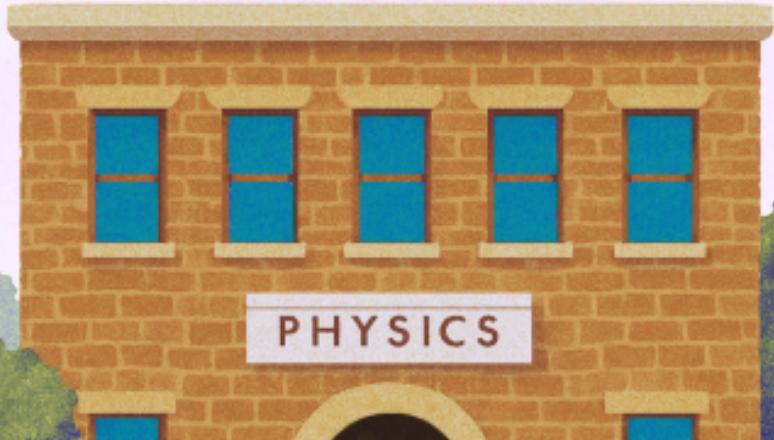
As the week began, Space found himself both excited and nervous. Monday marked his first Math class, and he was eager to see what university learning would be like.



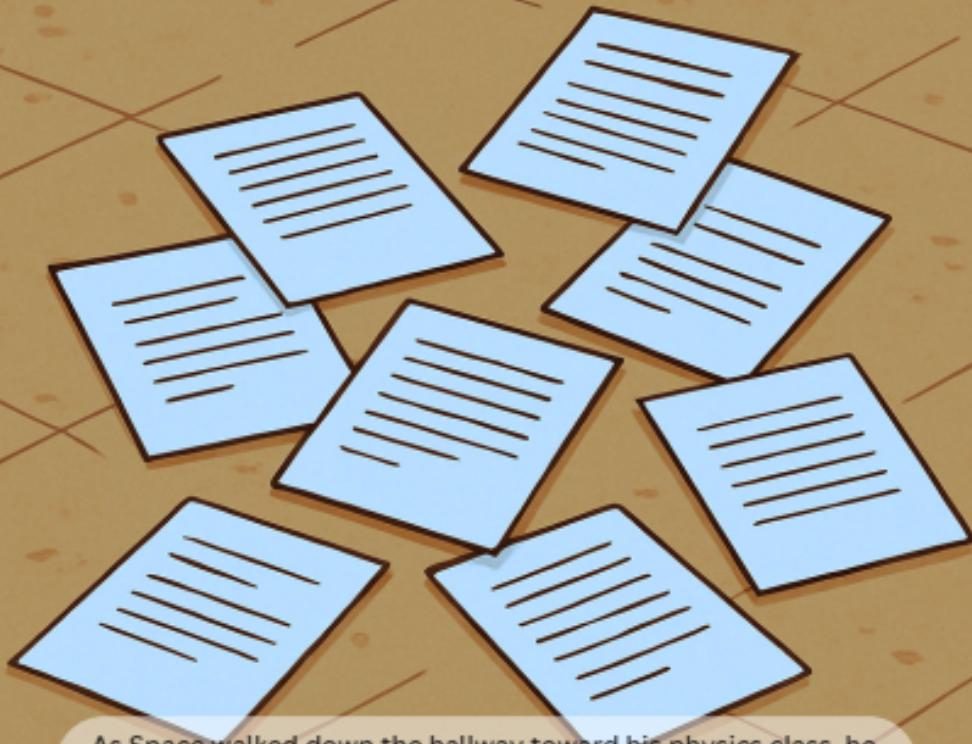
He set out early to find the Math building. He started at the main gate and walked to a fountain with a large duck statue. He then turned left toward the canteen. Near the canteen, he looked for a coffee shop and an ice cream shop that stood side by side. Between them was an alley that led straight to the futuristic Nano Science building. Just to its right was the Math building. The route felt a bit **tricky to remember**.

He attended the lecture, took notes, asked questions, and socialized. He followed the same routine throughout the week for all other Math sessions.

By the weekend, it was time for Physics—a subject he was curious about, though all its sessions were packed into a single, long Saturday.



He took a deep breath and set off from the familiar duck statue, this time turning right instead of left. Heading toward a sandstone library. From there, he followed a path that ran alongside it, past an old-looking Chemistry building and a church-like hall. Eventually, he reached a sleek Student Center, cut through it, and arrived at an empty football field. Beside it was a shortcut tunnel that led to a charming wooden coffee shop, it hasn't launch yet. Right next to it stood the masonry Physics building. The route seemed easier to remember than the one to the Math building.



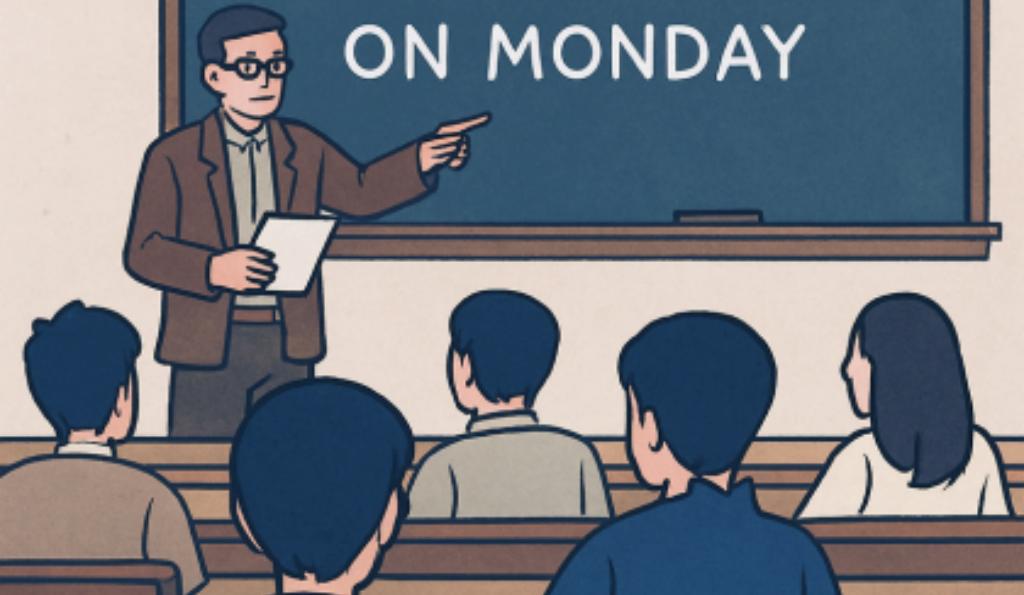
As Space walked down the hallway toward his physics class, he was carrying a stack of papers from his Math class. Suddenly, a guy bumped into him hard—Ruby, known for being kind of a jerk. The papers scattered all over the floor.

Before Space could react, a girl knelt down to help. "Here, let me give you a hand," she said kindly. It was Jessy—someone he hadn't met before, but she had a warm smile and a calm presence. She's also going to the Physics class.



Space thought she seemed really nice. "Thanks a lot," he said, genuinely grateful.

# EXTRA CLASS ON MONDAY



Space attended the class, and at the end of the session, the professor announced an extra class on Monday and reminded everyone to attend. Space took note, slipped to talk to Jessy for a bit before heading home.

As he left the class, Space chose to walk to the Physics building five more times. Even though he thought the route was easy, he wanted to cement it into memory.

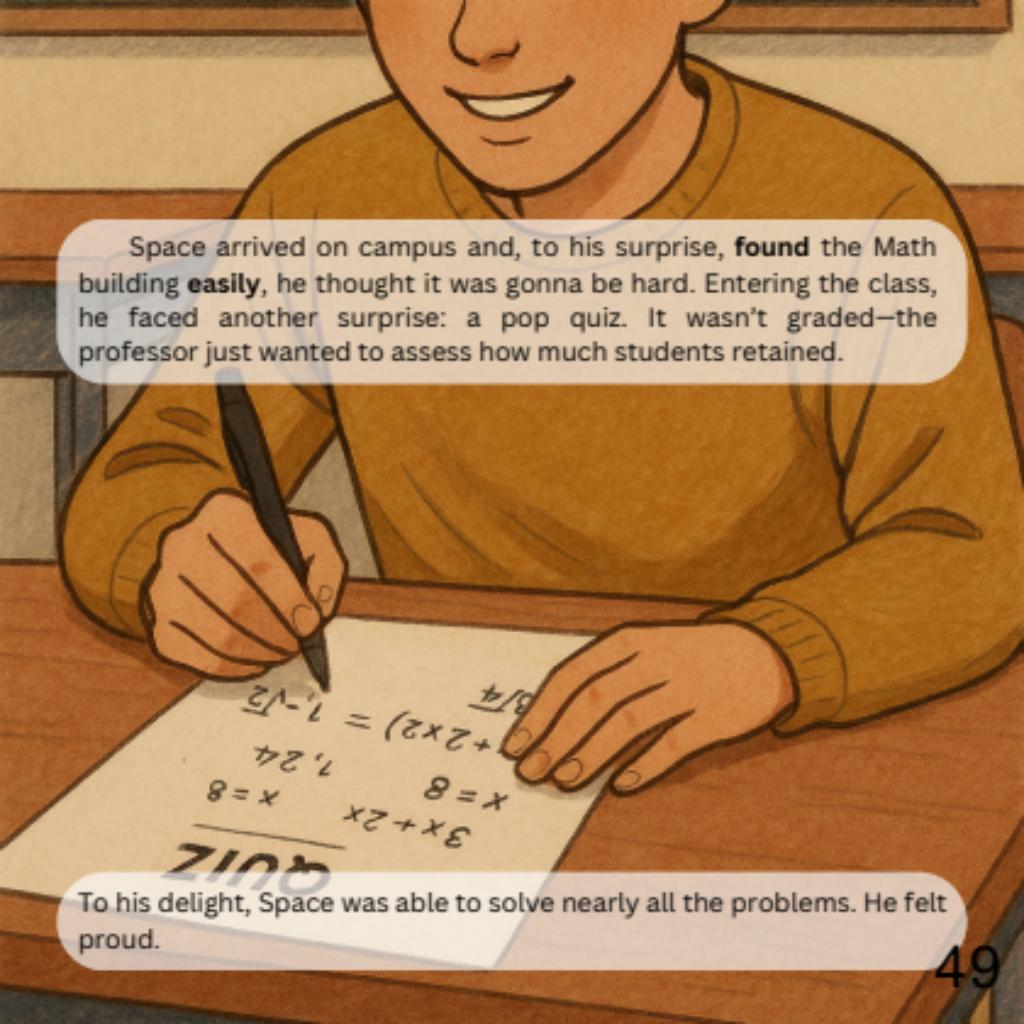




After the long haul on Saturday, Sunday was a much-needed pause. He gave himself a break and hung out with his new friend. A wise choice to relax and recharge.

At the end of the day, he exchanged text messages with Jessy before going to bed.

# Week 2



Space arrived on campus and, to his surprise, **found** the Math building **easily**, he thought it was gonna be hard. Entering the class, he faced another surprise: a pop quiz. It wasn't graded—the professor just wanted to assess how much students retained.

$$\begin{aligned} 8 &= x \\ 3x + 2x &= 8 \\ 5x &= 8 \\ x &= 1.6 \end{aligned}$$

**QUIZ**

To his delight, Space was able to solve nearly all the problems. He felt proud.

Later that day, he went to the extra Physics class. Oddly enough, he found himself **struggling** to remember the route. Fortunately, he ran into Jessy, who was happy to show him the way.



He was confused. "How am I getting lost here? I practiced this route five times! And it's even simpler than the one to the Math building."

There was no time to reflect. Class was about to start, and another surprise quiz was announced. This time, Space barely managed to answer half the questions.

Ruby, the mean student from last week, glanced at his score and said, "What a loser. You should quit Physics if you can't even do this easy quiz.".



Before Space could say anything, Jessy—who had also struggled on the quiz—stepped in, "Back off, Ruby. No one needs your trash talk," she said firmly.

Ruby just sneered, "Aw, how cute. Two losers together." he said, then walked off, laughing to himself.

Space felt defeated and angry. He sat under a large oak tree, wondering, "Do I just have an aptitude for Math but not for Physics?"

Then a thought struck him. "But wait, I found the Math building easily today, but not the Physics one—even though the Physics route is simpler. I can't have an aptitude for the Math-route but not the Physics-route. That wouldn't make sense. Maybe if I knew why I struggled with the route, it would also give me a clue as to why I didn't do well in Physics."

"So it's not aptitude, then what is it?"

He kept thinking. "Maybe I remember the Math route better because I took it more often?"

But then he remembered: "No, last Saturday, I walked the Physics route five more times. That's more repetition than the Math route."

He ruled that out too.

"So it's not complexity, not aptitude, not even raw repetition... What else?"

He napped under the tree.



When he woke, he remembered something from his timetable: Math sessions were spread out, while Physics sessions were crammed into a single day. He hypothesized that studying in shorter sessions spread out over time helps you retain information better than cramming it all into one long session. That had to be it, spacing study!

A colorful illustration of a young girl with long dark hair, wearing a pink t-shirt. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows a park-like setting with a large tree, green grass, and a brick building in the distance under a blue sky.

Just then, Jessy popped up out of nowhere, cheerful as ever. "Hey! A new coffee shop just opened up nearby. Feel like checking it out?"

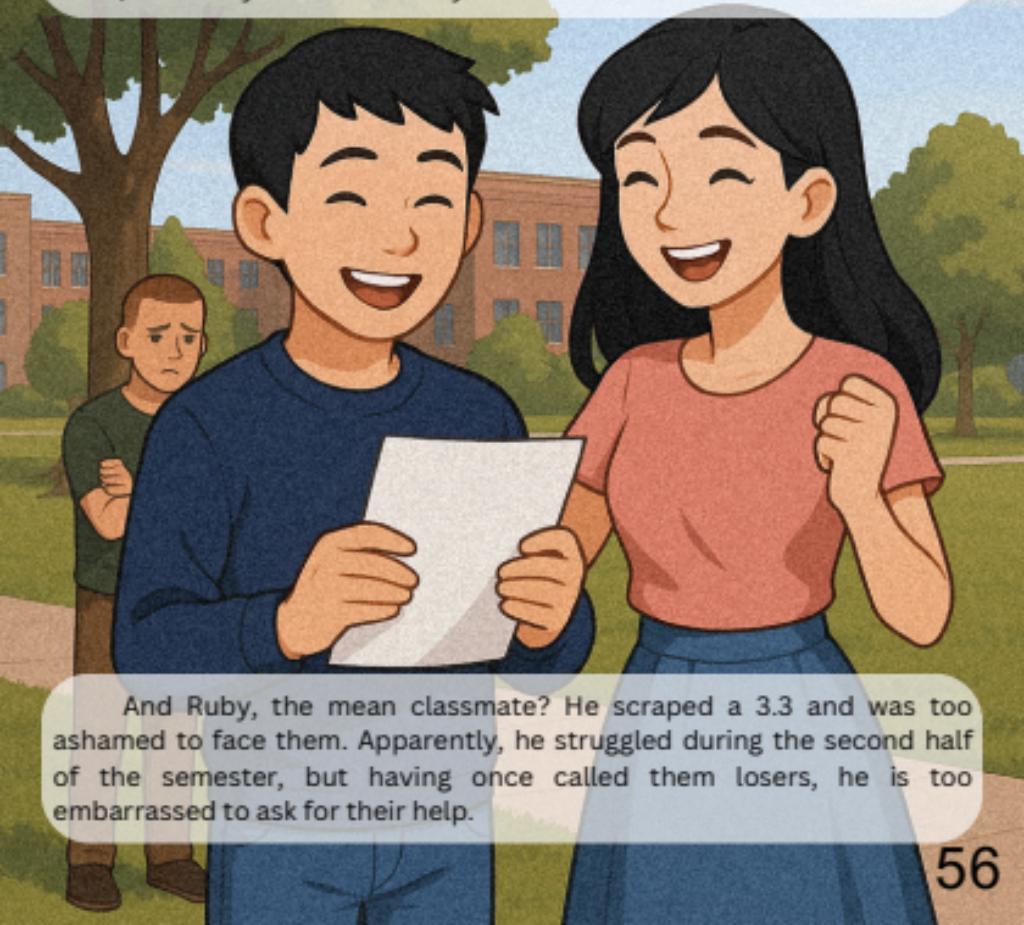
Space smiled. "Yeah, sure." He was glad to see her.

As they walked, he shared his new hypothesis about spacing study. Jessy listened thoughtfully, then said, "Interesting... want to put that theory to the test?"

With this insight, they would frequently study together in the wooden coffee shop next to the building, spreading their sessions across the week to mimic the structure of Math class. Over time, their understanding deepened, and their retention noticeably improved.



By the end of the semester, their hard work paid off. Space earned a GPA of 3.9, and Jessy followed closely with a 3.86.



And Ruby, the mean classmate? He scraped a 3.3 and was too ashamed to face them. Apparently, he struggled during the second half of the semester, but having once called them losers, he is too embarrassed to ask for their help.

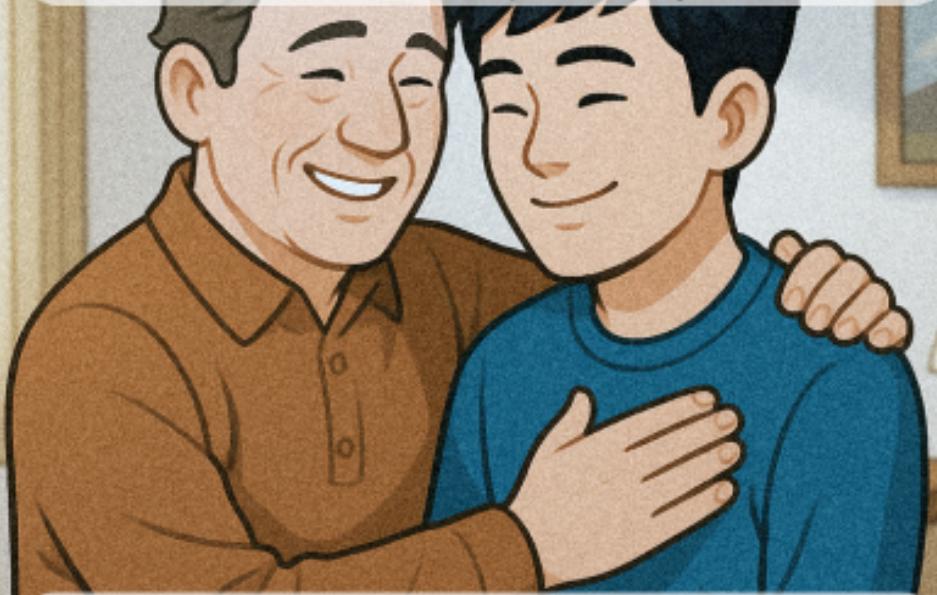


Later, Space came across an article describing the same strategy he had discovered: Spaced Repetition. It mentioned that it wasn't just about aptitude, content complexity, or repetition. The timing and distribution of repetition mattered even more. It goes on to explained how the brain consolidates information better when learning is spread out over time. He realized he'd adopted one of the most effective learning techniques. They continued applying the spaced repetition technique throughout their studies.



Later, Ruby also apologized to both of them. The tension faded, and they were no longer at odds. From time to time, they even helped each other out.

Space eventually graduated with first-class honors and landed a job as a rocket engineer at a big space agency. Jessy also graduated with first-class honors and became an engineer at a major tech firm. Ruby also went on to land a role at an aerospace company.



By that time, Space and Jessy had already started dating. Meanwhile, Space's uncle, who had once doubted whether he knew what he was signing up for, ended up deeply impressed. Watching Space grow into someone so driven and accomplished, he couldn't help but admire him.

A few years later, the two couples got married, and have been living happily ever since.

The end



That day when Space got lost, and couldn't find his Physics class, he found something else instead—a technique that would shape his future, a lifelong partner by his side, and a career he'd come to love. In the end, getting a little lost was the best thing that ever happened to him.

Space, Got lost and found more.

## Introduction to “Deliberate Practice”

Now let's talk about this seemingly fictional study technique where you can **retain more by studying less**. Sounds too good to be true, right? But guess what – this technique actually exists. It's commonly known as **“spaced repetition”**, and it's a well-studied, well proven method for learning more effectively. (Dunlosky, 2013).

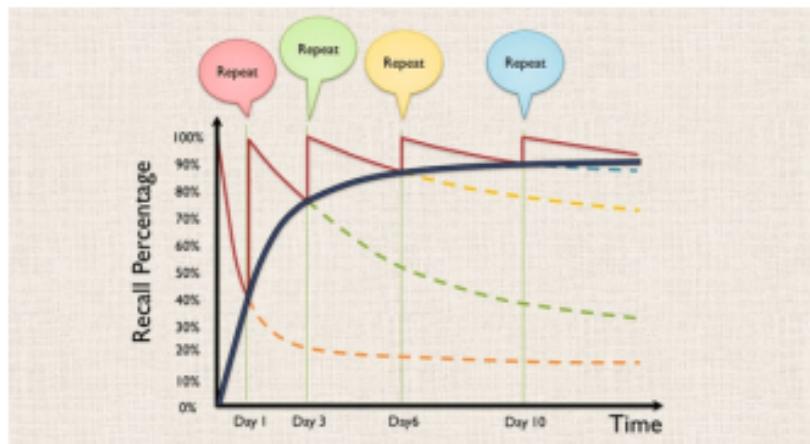
Next time you're trying to learn something, instead of cramming everything into one big session, spread it out into shorter sessions, with increasing gaps between them.

Just like our story: Space. He get to walk on math-route on four separate days: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday – each with a bigger gap than the last. Then there's physics-route, which he practiced 5 times, but all crammed into one same day. In the end? He remembered the math-route way better, even though it was the harder route. The same thing happened with his Math and Physic performance, **spaced repetition** led to better performance.

Why? Because when you study something, you're first loading it into short-term memory, and that fades fast. For something to stick long-term, it has to go through memory consolidation, which mostly happens during sleep. While you sleep, your brain even rehearses what you learned, especially the stuff you struggled with. If you just keep grinding without giving your brain time to do its thing, you're basically wasting effort. So instead of cramming, give yourself breaks. Let your brain work behind

the scenes. And yes, the spacing between sessions should increase over time. Studies show that if you review just before you forget, you lock it in stronger each time – and that's how you end up learning more while studying less.

Look at this chart below regarding Ebbinghaus Forgetting Curve:



Source: Sherzod Gafar, 2024, via [heylama.com/blog/spaced-repetition](http://heylama.com/blog/spaced-repetition)

Based on this chart, a viable strategy would be to review on Monday(Day0), Tuesday(Day1), Thursday(Day3), Sunday(Day6). Now, this is merely a suggestion to get you started, you should use your own judgment to space things out based on how you are performing. Now off you go, try it the next time you study.

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