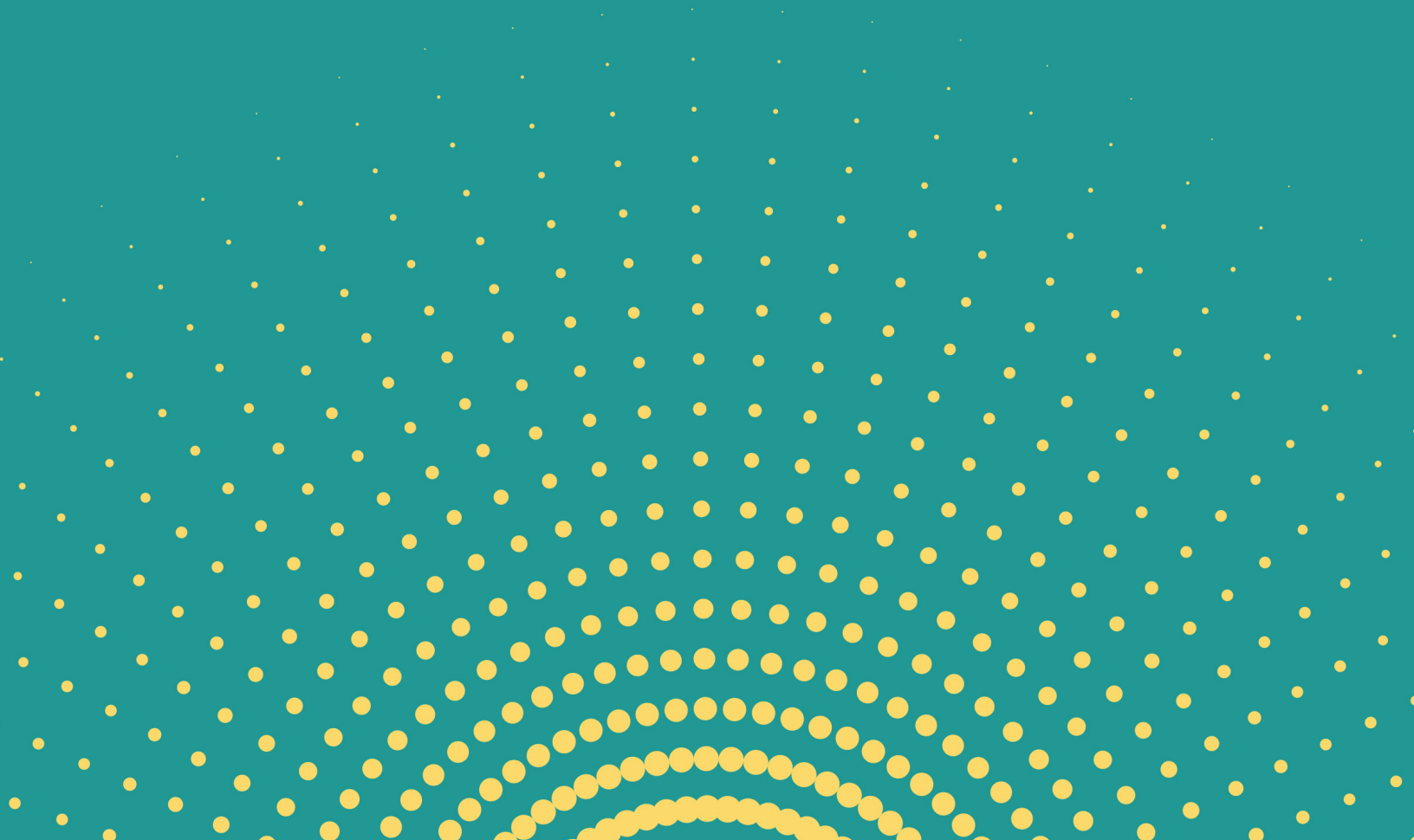
ULTRALEARNING
PROJECT WORKBOOK

A complete walkthrough to show you how to tackle your next project the ultralearning way.



ULTRALEARNING PROJECT WORKBOOK

The goal of this workbook is to assist you in planning, executing and reviewing your own ultralearning project.

It's best, of course, if you first read the book ULTRALEARNING, and then apply it to this worksheet as I'll be referencing concepts and ideas from the book without much explanation here.

However, at the same time, going through this workbook in a cursory way can also give you a chance to get some rough ideas in your head about what you'd like to learn and how, before reading the book. Then, when you encounter ideas or tactics in the book you'd like to use, you'll already have a place for them.

I've divided this workbook into three parts:

1. PLANNING,
2. EXECUTION,
3. REVIEW.

Planning is what you do before you start. As I argue in the book, this is an incredibly important part, not just for preparing your schedule and materials, but also for creating motivation. Poorly designed plans result will impede your motivation more than anything else.

The execution section should be tackled once you start your project. These provide weekly check-in journals where you can run through your progress, giving you a chance to see what you could improve for the future.

Finally review can happen once you've reached the end of your project, to learn from both your triumphs and frustrations.

1. PLANNING

1-1. What do you want to learn?

The first thing to ask yourself is what you might like to learn. It's okay to have long list here (I certainly do), or a short one, if you already know what kind of project you want to tackle.

Below, write out all the things you'd like learn:

Next, it's useful to try to divide which things you're learning for instrumental reasons and which things you're learning for their own sake. Instrumental projects are those you're doing to accomplish something else (e.g. learning a programming language to get a promotion), intrinsic projects are those you're doing without a specific purpose in mind (e.g. learning French).

For each idea above, separate them into:

1) Instrumental or 2) Intrinsic projects

(If you've printed this workbook out, you can circle the instrumental ones rather than recopy them.)

1-2. Choosing your topic

From the next part going forward we're going to pick just one topic or skill you want to learn. It's totally fine to repeat this section multiple times with different topics, as often you only realize your drive to learn something once you explore it.

Pick which skill or topic you want to learn here:

1-3. Vetting your choice (Instrumental Projects Only)

If you happened to pick something you're learning for instrumental reasons, now is a good time to do an additional step—double-checking whether learning the skill in question is actually going to be useful.

The best way to do this is to apply the Expert Interview Method. Reach out to someone who has already accomplished this result you're trying to reach, and ask whether your chosen project is likely to help.

If the person you contacted think it's in the wrong direction, try to ask what skills or mastery would matter more instead.

You don't always have to follow this advice. Sometimes working on an unusual project can have benefits, even if it isn't following the path others would suggest. However, it's good to know this in advance, as many people mistakenly go down the wrong direction on instrumental projects because they never talk to somebody who knows more.

1-4. Limit your scope

The next step of the project is to limit what you're actually going to do. Good projects have:

1. **A concrete starting point. (See Directness principle in ULTRALEARNING)**
2. **Set aside time for learning. (See Focus)**

Let's start with the first aspect, a concrete starting point.

It's much better to pick a fairly narrow, concrete target for your ultralearning effort to start, which can broaden out later. This not only prevents your project from losing directness, but also because it's much easier to expand a project midway than to contract it later. Starting focused will help you out later.

Good examples: Learn Python to create a script to automate my accounting work, Learn enough Spanish to interact with people in an upcoming trip to Costa Rica.

Bad examples (Don't do these): Learn programming, Learn Spanish.

Pick your concrete starting point here:

Next you need to design your schedule for learning.

I recommend planning your schedule now, in advance, even if you have to adjust it later. Putting the hours down and planning them in your calendar is a necessary (although not sufficient) step to mentally commit to the work. If you're not willing to put it in your calendar, you certainly won't be willing to do the work when the time comes.

Good examples: I'll work from 7am-9am every weekday morning on my project, I'm going to work 9am-6pm with a lunch break on weekdays for one month.

Bad examples: Work every day, put in time whenever I can.

Write out your tentative schedule here:

Now, importantly, you need to transfer your schedule to your calendar. Does it conflict with anything coming up? Any work or personal issues that might make finishing difficult? Preparing this, in advance, is a big part of getting the project ready.

1-5. Choose your materials and method

Once you've set aside time and picked your starting point, you now need to find materials and methods to get you there.

These are going to be diverse and specific to the exact subject you're learning. Sometimes they will be plentiful (there are a million resources for learning Chinese. Sometimes you'll be lucky if you can find a single decent book (say for learning an obscure language).

A good place to start is just by googling your topic and recording links to everything you find (books, courses, apps, guides, tutorials, etc.) in a spreadsheet. This will be useful to turn to if your chosen resource turns out to not be very good.

List some of the resources you encountered for learning here:

Once you've gone through some resources, you can start asking yourself how you'll use them to learn. This is a point where reviewing the book ULTRALEARNING and all nine principles can be helpful. Simple questions such as "Does the practice this resource creates match the way I will use the skill/knowledge in real life? (Directness)", "Am I going to need more memorization or deep understanding?" or, "Does this offer feedback?" are all useful ways of comparing and contrasting different methods.

It can often be hard to fully judge materials from the outset. Experimentation will be key, so my advice is to start with a resource, and with an eye to the principles of ultralearning, see how it deviates from the ideal. Then, you can either replace it with a better resource (if one exists) or take steps to compensate.

For static resources like books and videos, just following along isn't going to be enough. You should always have some kind of practice activity in addition to the things you need to absorb more passively. Sometimes that practice will naturally be suggested by the material (homework, quizzes) other times, it will be up to you to generate.

Below, write out what practice activity you'd like to apply for your project (or multiple possible practice activities if you're not sure):

For additional exercises that can help you identify resources, see Principle: Metalearning, from the book.

1-6. Are You Ready to Start?

The final step is less about logistics and more about your emotional state and readiness. A good project design should make you feel a little excited/nervous, neither feeling impossible nor trivial.

If your project feels way too hard, pick an easier starting point. It's always possible to ramp up the project if that starting point turns out to be too easy.

If your project is going to last more than three months, I highly recommend doing a pilot week. This is a week-long test of your potential learning schedule to see how it fits into your life. If, after that week, it feels good and smooth, you can keep going. If you feel like it's not going to plan, even in that first week, you need to step back and redesign.

Ambitious challenges are built off of smaller ones. So if you don't feel like you have a great track record with these sorts of projects, it's always okay to start smaller and more focused to begin with. Year-long, full-time projects are best undertaken once you've already done a bunch of successful month-long projects.

2. EXECUTION

Once you start your project, you should have a weekly check-in with yourself.

Here's a few simple questions to ask:

2-1. Did I meet my schedule this week? If not, what can I do to meet it next week?

2-2. Should I continue with my current approach or try something else?

Something else could mean different materials, drills, practice environments or techniques.

a) Am I maintaining a connection to the situation where I want to eventually use the skills and knowledge? (Directness)

b) Am I focusing on my weakest points or isolating particularly important ones for specific practice? (Drill)

c) Am I getting feedback on my approach, and filtering it to focus on what I can actually control and modify? (Feedback)

d) Am I spacing out my exposure to information to be remembered? Am I retrieving it or just passively reviewing it? (Retention and Retrieval)

e) Do I understand what I'm learning, or am I just memorizing it? (Intuition)

2-3. Am I on-track to reach my goal? If not, what can I change to meet it?

Keep these ideas in mind as you work on your project. Often it won't be clear what you need to change to improve your approach, which is why experimentation and monitoring your results is so important.

3. REVIEW

Regardless of how your project went, once you've reached the end, you should spend a little time to review it.

Start out by writing what went well. Did you make any improvements over last time in your overall approach? What aspects of your project would you repeat in future ones?

What could have gone better? Where did you get side-tracked by ineffective approaches? What would you do instead?

Finishing a project is rarely an ending, but a beginning of learning new things and maintaining old skills. The first decision to make is what you're going to do about what you've learned in this project. You have three choices:

1. Mastery.
You can choose to go further with a new ultralearning project. Reach the next level of the skill or expand your ambitions.

2. Maintenance.
You can try to maintain your knowledge without a specific goal to improve toward.

3. Relearning.
Alternatively, you may decide that the best thing to do is to have no specific plan to maintain the skill and simply relearn it when you need it again. This could be because the situation where you needed to use it has passed, or because you only need to retain some of what you've learned.

If you chose to master your subject further, you can repeat this workbook again with a new project.

If you chose to relearn the subject later, you can ask yourself what the best way would be to refresh this knowledge later. Are there any practice exercises you could save for later that would make it easier to pick up with less time?

Finally, if you choose to maintain the skill, you need a plan of action to maintain it. What matters most here is consistency, rather than volume. Any maintenance plan, stuck to consistently for a long enough period of time, is superior to one which sounds good on paper but doesn't endure in practice.

Good examples: 30 minutes conversation practice over Skype in a language you've learned, Work on a monthly coding project to keep your skills fresh, Subscribe to a blog that covers the topic you learned.

Write below your plan for maintaining what you've learned: