The Feynman Technique: The Best Way to Learn Anything

The Feynman Technique is a method of learning that unleashes your potential and forces you to develop a deep understanding.

Richard Feynman (https://fs.blog/intellectual-giants/richard-feynman/) was a Nobel prize-winning physicist. His real superpower, however, was his ability to explain complicated subjects to others in simple terms. He realized that jargon, vague words, and complexity reveal a lack of understanding.

There are four key steps to the Feynman Technique:

1. Choose a concept you want to learn about
2. Explain it to a 12 year old
3. Reflect, Refine, and Simplify
4. Organize and Review

Let's explore these in more detail so you can put this to work today.

Two Types of Knowledge

Feynman understood the difference between understanding something and knowing the name of something (https://fs.blog/2015/01/richard-feynman-knowing-something/), and it's one of the most important reasons for his success. He was never content with just knowing the name of something. He wanted to understand it at a deeper level.

> **The person who says he knows what he thinks but cannot express it usually does not know what he thinks.**
>
> MORTIMER ADLER

The Feynman Technique

Step 1: Choose a concept you want to learn about.

What topic are you curious about?

Once you identify a topic, take out a blank sheet of paper. Write out everything you know about the subject you want to understand as if you were teaching it to a child.

As you learn more about the topic, add it to your sheet. Often people find it helpful to use a different color pen so you can see your learning grow.

Once you think you understand the topic, move on to step 2.

Step 2: Explain it to a 12-year-old

Now that you think you understand a topic reasonably well, explain it to a 12-year-old.

Use your sheet as a reference and try to remove any jargon or complexity. Only use simple words. Only use words a child would understand. (If you want an example of how to do this, check out *Thing Explainer: Complicated Stuff in Simple Words (https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0544668251/ref=as_li_qf_asin_il_tl?ie=UTF8&tag=farnamstreet-20&creative=9325&linkCode=as2&creativeASIN=0544668251&linkId=00a7b273ca9b07a379a9c1d15109e534)*. The book uses the 1,000 most common words to explain things.)

> **Anyone can make a subject complicated but only someone who understands can make it simple.**

Jargon hides our lack of understanding. When forced to write out an idea from start to finish in simple language, you discover where you struggle … where it doesn't quite make sense … where you get frustrated … where you don't really understand as well as you thought. Only by identifying gaps in your knowledge can you fill them.

Step 3: Reflect, Refine, and Simplify

Only when you can explain the subject in simple terms do you understand it.

> **Simple is beautiful.**

Review your notes to make sure you didn't mistakenly borrow any jargon or gloss over anything complicated.

Read it out loud as if to a child. If the explanation isn't simple enough or sounds confusing, that's a good indication that you need to reflect and refine.

Go back to the source material, reviewing the parts you don't quite understand yet.

Repeat until you have a simple explanation.

Step 4: Organize and Review

To test your understanding in the real world, run it by someone else. How effective was your explanation? What questions did they ask? What parts did they get confused about?

When you're happy with your understanding, take the page you created with a simple explanation and put it into a binder. Following this technique for everything you learn gives you a binder full of learning that you can review a couple of times a year.

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The most successful people in the world can take complicated subjects and explain them simply (and memorably) to an audience.

Understanding this technique can help you avoid getting fooled by others. The next time you're listening to someone explain something using jargon or complicated terms, ask them to explain it in simple terms. If they get frustrated, it's a sign they don't fully understand what they're talking about. If they did, they'd be able to explain it better.

The Feynman Technique is the foundation for our 'blank sheet' approach to supercharging your reading and retention (https://fs.blog/reading/).

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