How I Learn - A Personal Statement

I often learn by making mistakes. As a kid I loved playing with physical objects, and trying out the concepts learnt in school. I discharged batteries by connecting the terminals using a strip of aluminium. I shorted the supply to the entire house after plugging in a electric object I 'repaired'. I learned that spilt milk is not easy to clean and that mom is much smarter than me, after having skated around the house on slowly melting frozen milk packets, marvelling at how lubrication reduced friction allowing sliding.

I often understood things with ease. The few things I did not understand created mental blocks. I have now learnt to make deliberate attempts to work over or around these mental blocks.

I learn best by visualising both content or concepts. I draw charts to understand relationships, create pictorial mnemonics to remember foreign languages (example, for gender in German), and google for images before looking for text. 'Complex numbers', a theoretical construct of mathematics, was once a major mental block for me. But the same concept and its problems became extremely intuitive when I started drawing parallels with the much more visual 'coordinate geometry' system.

I have also realised that, often, preparing to learn is as important as the learning activity itself. There is no point in even trying to do academic learning if the body is uncomfortable (say if I have a headache). A clean room/desk and some music playing in the background is perfect for learning math, and for light reading. I pause the music if I need to focus all my attention to something difficult I encounter. I look for more examples and applications for concepts difficult to grasp. Make notes, and read out aloud to make things clearer in my head.
I get easily distracted. Every deliberate attempt made at learning something needs to be accompanied by decluttering the environment of possible distractions (like people, internet pings, banging doors, barking dogs etc.) Hence, for doing some serious reading, I prefer a visit to the library.

Lately I have begun taking many tutorials. I use *skillshare* extensively to learn all sorts of skills - cactus repotting, pottery, hand lettering, aftereffects, photography etc. These tutorials are more often than not accompanied by some hands on application to set the processes well in the brain.

I am guessing, a lot of travel has also been adding to my pool of thoughts and learnings. Every new place, its people, the food and customs teach me something new. While trying to make sense of every new experience, I re-evaluate everything I have learnt so far. Travel and reading about new places and its people has opened me up to a new feeling of a larger, much complex world. It has made me receptive of thoughts and values much different than mine.

Last, but not the least, we have been reading up about how our brain functions. While deliberately trying to learn something, I keep in mind these concepts of chunking, memory, storage and retrieval, etc. So, learning about how to learn best, helps me learn better.