

Three strategies I put to work trying to learn things:

Small Victories

I learnt swimming decades after the other children had made the neighborhood pond their own. When I started learning swimming, I made sure there was something new that I learnt everyday. A new milestone, a new trick, a bigger stretch of water covered without drowning, a few more seconds spent under water, etc. I learn by setting smaller, private goals along the way. I may have learnt a couple of tricks solely for want of goals on some particularly rainy days.

Having something to celebrate works like an anchor for the next lesson. I think this came into being after I finished formal higher-secondary education, of the prescriptive kind—with only so much room to set goals inside of a set timetable. Afterwards, in college, with softer deadlines and the ‘process’ of learning left for us to decide, I could work on this instant-gratification-way of dealing with learning. In professional practice, this easily translated to learning by doing, since a lot of the small victories were made visible only after a work-related task was completed. I keep track by capturing screenshots as I work, often publishing these as the project progresses. This works out in other ways too; people are more open with comments and course-corrections when they encounter an unfinished product. This practise lends itself to easy reflection on the process itself, leaving traces of missteps and points of anchoring and comparison. This imagines the learning process itself as a thing to be proud of, a means at least equal in value as the end.

(As one writes this, one realises that one learns from screenshots people-one-looks-up-to leave of their work too; valuable lessons on optimising resources and organising workflows, in addition to the hints of context that a screen-capture often provides. I enjoy learning from behind-the-scenes as much as from the scenes themselves.)

In-Jokes

Making elaborately structured (temporary) notes of things I read (about the things I am learning) is another way I make sense of relationships that help understand these better. (Seldom looked at afterwards, these might as well be made on etch-a-sketches without putting a dent in their value.) The temporariness, with hindsight, often reflects in the conversational nature of these markings—snarky comments or jokes masquerading as observations. These may be looked at as efforts to make things personal and thus, less of a chore to remember and appropriate.

Cliffhangers

The third thing I focus on is leaving things halfway when I stop and take a break from learning. This advice is appropriated from Stephen King, the author, from his book *On Writing*, where he advises the enthusiast to leave a sentence half-written before abandoning the desk, so there is no starting trouble once she comes back to it later. At times this is hard to stick to, more so since it appears to contradict the first method. One finds that it takes some determination to do this, since the deadlines are progressively softer and the percentage of instruction smaller, climbing up the education ladder.

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