

Feynman's Learning Strategy

Sunday, 4 December 2016

09:18

There are three steps to the Feynman Technique.

Step 1: Teach it to a child

Take out a blank sheet of paper and write the subject you want to learn at the top. Write out what you know about the subject as if you were *teaching it to a child*. Not your smart adult friend but an eight-year-old who has just enough vocabulary and attention to understand basic concepts and relationships.

A lot of people tend to use complicated

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{{range .Page.Params.resources}}
  {{$link := $.Page.Resources.GetMatch .name}}
  <div class="carousel-item">
    
    <div class="carousel-caption d-none d-md-block">
      <h5>{{.name}}</h5>
    </div>
  </div>
{{end}}
{{range .Page.Params.resources}}
  {{$link := $.Page.Resources.GetMatch .name}}
  <div class="carousel-item">
    
    <div class="carousel-caption d-none d-md-block">
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vocabulary and jargon to mask when they don't understand something. The problem is we only fool ourselves because we know that we don't understand. In addition, using jargon causes misunderstanding from those around us.

When you write out an idea from start to finish in simple terms that a child can understand (tip: use only the most common words), you force yourself to understand the concept at a deeper level. Simplify relationships and connections between ideas. When you have a clear understanding of where you have some confusion, tension is good—it heralds an opportunity to learn.

Step 2: Review

In step one, you will inevitably encounter gaps in your understanding where you're forgetting something important, are not sure about it, or simply have trouble connecting an important concept. This is invaluable feedback because you've discovered the boundaries of your knowledge. **Competence is knowing the limit of your knowledge**—you've just identified one!

This is where the learning starts. Now you know where the gaps are. Go back to the *source* material and re-learn it until you understand it in basic terms.

Identifying the boundaries of your understanding also helps you recognize mistakes you're liable to make and increases your confidence when applying knowledge.

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Step 3: Organize and simplify

Now you have a set of hand-crafted notes. Review them and make sure you didn't mistakenly borrow any of the jargon from the original material. **Organize them into a simple story that flows.** Read them out loud. If the explanation isn't simple or clear or confusing that's a good indication that your understanding of the area still needs some work.

Step 4 (optional): Transmit

If you really want to be sure of your understanding, run your explanation by someone (ideally who knows little of the subject—or find a friend who is new to the field!). **The ultimate test of your knowledge is your capacity to explain it to another.**

Feynman's approach intuitively believes that intelligence is a process of growth, which dovetails nicely with the work of Carol Dweck. Dweck beautifully describes the difference between a [fixed and growth mindset](#).

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