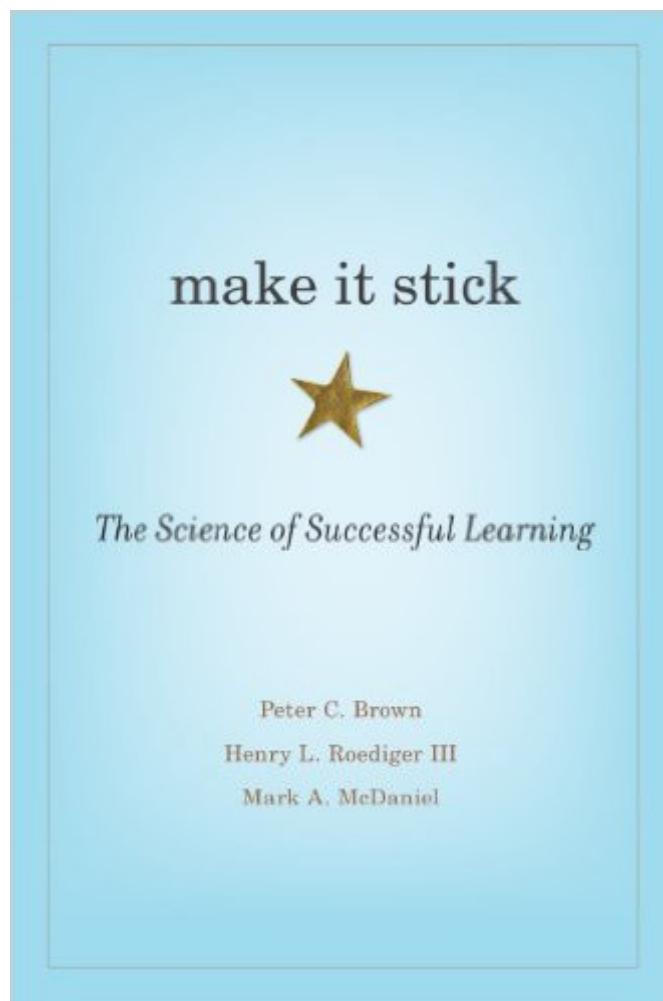


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# Make It Stick



## **Synopsis**

Drawing on cognitive psychology and other fields, Make It Stick offers techniques for becoming more productive learners, and cautions against study habits and practice routines that turn out to be counterproductive. The book speaks to students, teachers, trainers, athletes, and all those interested in lifelong learning and self-improvement.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Okay, well maybe I am overstating that a little. But the main "thesis" of Peter Brown's book - aside from being a summary of what cognitive science data shows about how we learn - is basically that many of the things we often assume about learning are wrong. Here are some of them: we learn best by reading and rereading a passage until we really understand it. **WRONG!** We learn best when we isolate a skill and practice it over and over again. **WRONG!** We all have learning styles

that are the way we learn best. WRONG! IQ (or something like it) imposes relatively firm limits on how much information we can absorb. WRONG! In this pretty easy-reading book, Peter Brown summarizes some of the latest findings in cognitive science, and many of these findings contradict what is often assumed about learning. First, many k-12 and college students are taught to (and do) use the 'reread and highlight' method to try and absorb content. Well, while this works to an extent, it leads more to an illusion of mastery than mastery. What works better? Read the content and quiz yourself; information retrieval is the key. Retrieving helps to build stronger connections in the brain that will lock information into memory. What's more - and this is another chapter - the harder the retrieval, the stronger your retention of what is retrieved. (So, writing a short essay recalling the concepts works better than true/false and multiple choice recall.) Another myth? While we all certainly have learning preferences (I like to receive my information in written form), that doesn't mean we learn best when receiving information in that form (I can do as well when I receive information audibly as when it is written, even though I prefer the latter).

Is there anything new in this book? I believe there is sage advice in it for many of us. That our brains adapt is good but also bad for studying. We become bored. For many of us, we were never taught how our minds work and how we should leverage its natural processes to learn. Sometimes, practice or studying feels painfully slow and we often switch to another method that feels good. Unfortunately, we often fail at assessing how much we're learning and have actually learned. Some students were never taught how to learn, and had few, if any, good teachers/mentors. Some teachers were never taught how to teach, and have forgotten what it was like to be a student. This book is for those both groups. The examples and advice for teachers and corporate trainers is also well written and useful. If you have had good teachers or learning exemplars, you might find this book less valuable than will most people.

**SUMMARY: PROs:** This book will show you how to structure your learning and assessment processes to learn and confirm you're actually retaining the material. It provides 27 pages of endnotes on scientific studies that support its recommendations. Having read and applied the principles of both MIS and WSSK (see below), I can say they do work, very well.

**CONS:** Be prepared to look for what you want. Most of us will focus on the prescriptions of Chapter 8: e.g. avoid rereading as a primary study method, and do use the blank paper assessment test, etc..

Summary of the key concepts in the book:

- Conventional Wisdom: Make learning easy
- Best practice: Design learning with desirable difficulties
- Discussion: 'Learning is deeper and more durable when

it is effortful. • œDifficulties that elicit more effort and that slow down learning | will more than compensate for their inconvenience by making the learning stronger, more precise, and more enduring. Short-term impediments that make for stronger learning have come to be called desirable difficulties. • œDon't assume you are doing something wrong if the learning feels hard. • œNot all difficulties in learning are desirable ones. Anxiety while taking a test seems to represent an undesirable difficulty. • Slow down to find meaning. Always read prior to the lecture. œTraining has to be engaging in order to hold employees' attention. • Conventional Wisdom: Concentrate on one topic at a time (aka. massed practice) Best practice: Interleave different but related topics Discussion: œLearning from interleaved practice feels slower than learning from massed practice. • While interleaving can impede performance during initial learning (tests taken immediately after exposure), interleaving has been shown to boost œfinal test performance by a remarkable 215 percent. • In addition, œcommonalities | learned through massed practice proved less useful than the differences | learned through interleaving. • œIn interleaving, you don't move from a complete practice set of one topic to go to another. You switch before each practice is complete. | You need to shuffle your flashcards.

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