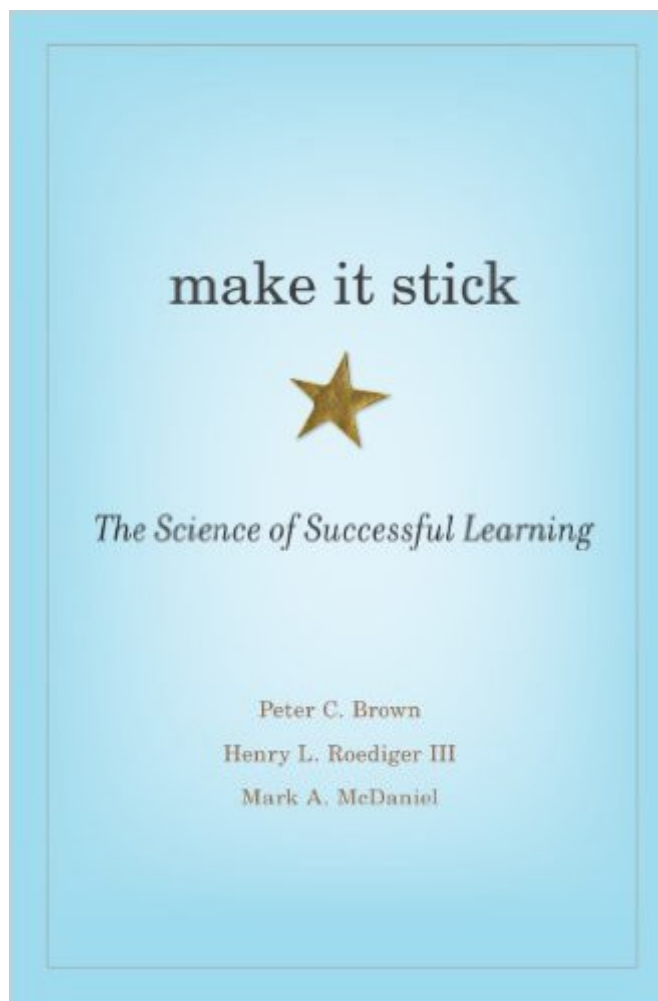


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# Make It Stick



## 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). Brown reviews literature that shows that, at least as of now, there is no evidence that shows that how one receives information substantially affects how well we learn the material (after all, hearing or reading a phone number is immaterial to what I am remembering: not the sound or sight of the number, but the number itself). But what they do find is that whether one is an "example learner" or a "rule learner" does have an impact in how well one learns. That is, those who see and practice a math problem and are able to see what the rules are behind the example and commit the rule, rather than the example, to memory will tend to learn better. Also, another factor that affects how well we learn is our mindset, whether we learn for mastery or learn for performance. Those who learn for performance - so that they can show how good they are - tend to tackle learning new things (things that might make them look bad) with trepidation, but those who learn for mastery aspire to acquire new skills openly, without regard to whether they will fail before mastering. These are just some of the lessons from this book. Whether you are a student, teacher, professor, coach, trainer, or any other professional whose job entails teaching others, this is a good book to have. (I'm a professor in a College of Education, and I definitely plan on allowing what I've gleaned from this book to inform my practice.) It is quite informative not only by way of learning theory, but backs up the theory with both empirics and suggestions for practice. Good one.

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..

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While reading, I noticed two points made by the authors that will shape your experience:

- 1) page ix in the Preface: "first author is a storyteller"
- 2) page 200: "early readers (of the book draft) urged the author to get specific with practical advice"

I agree with reviewers Soumen, T. Pagni, Economist: yes, the book could've been much shorter and focused on the advice. I also agree with the numerous reviewers who praise it: yes it provides excellent practical insight into the best ways to learn (both physical and mental tasks). I will now use the book to evaluate the book.

- 1) Interpret/Elaborate/Infer from what I'm reading: Why is a storyteller the first author? I'm glad they told me. I'm now prepared to wade through long winded stories to find the main points.
- 2) Find the underlying rules/principles in what I've read:- Allow time to forget. You **MUST** give yourself time to partially, but not completely, forget the material. Then give yourself time to struggle with recalling it.- Effortful (i.e. NOT effortless!) recall is good. It dramatically increases retention.- sustained, deliberate practice, even when it feels ponderous, is helping me learn- Trust the process of study, forget, retrieve.- Reflection is a form of retrieval practice.
- 3) Scatter/Vary/Mix the information while you're studying it. By mixing the precepts in with the stories, the patterns were harder to see. I had to pick up the book several times because I was so annoyed by all the storytelling. However, **DURING REFLECTION** away from the text, I realized they were deliberately embedding kernels in the stories and forcing me to look for them. Upon revisiting the material, I found myself *\*wanting\** to find and connect the ideas spread across the stories and the book. Clever, and more effective than giving me a list to memorize. During retrieval practice, I actually started remembering some of the advice from the stories, more so than from the explicit recommendations.
- 4) Change the material **BEFORE**

you've mastered it in that session What are they trying to teach me? Sometimes before they "got to the point", they switched to yet another story (!) This made me really focus on connecting what I read previously to what I was currently reading. Thankfully, the chapters often end with a "Takeaways" section. RELATE IT TO WHAT I ALREADY KNOW: I consider this book (MIS) a valuable complement to What Smart Students Know by A. Robinson (WSSK). WSSK tells you in much greater detail what to do while you are a matriculating student i.e. how to approach the conventional schooling process, how to assess class/book structure, how to relate the material to what you've learned, what specifically you should do during the pre-study, study and post-study periods. MIS does present specific study methods but it also presents the bigger picture of learning: Why the "learn via re-reading" intuition is wrong, yet feels right. Why the "learn via struggling" process is right, yet feels wrong. In general, WSSK fully develops the terse advice of MIS p207: Elaborate/question/interpret what you're reading MIS fully develops the terse advice WSSK p118: Quiz yourself Periodically. Both are excellent resources for improving your habits for studying from books. Personally, the advice in this book is worth far more than the cost of \$21, and a few hours of reading, reflection and note-taking that I paid for it. I do recommend you buy it and apply its principles, even to itself.

So I read about 10-20 reviews of this book because it sounded very interesting. I came to this conclusion. It probably has some good info but it's surrounded by hundreds of pages of fluff. If you read a lot of books about learning new skills or other nonfiction, you know this to be a FAR too common theme among newer books. It's like they can't sell it if it doesn't reach 300 pages. No one will pay for a well written concise 20-40 page book. Well, after reading through reviews I found the article this was based on - if you have good google skills, then you should be able to find the PDF for free (I did): What Works, What Doesn't - Some study techniques accelerate learning, whereas others are just a waste of time - The Scientific American Mind ([mind.scientificamerican.com](http://mind.scientificamerican.com)) - by John Dunlosky, Katherine Rawson, Elizabeth Marsh, Mitchell Nathan and Daniel Willingham This is a little 6 page article which seems to explain >80% of the key points listed in this book. Glad I read it and saved tons of time!

I really like this book because it was based on scientifically proven methods of learning. I'm in a very tough program at school and the methods that this book has suggested has brought me from C's to A's.

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