Tuesday’s Tidbits

Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning

Scientists have studied the psychology of learning for over one hundred years and have many theories about how we learn. McDaniel and Roediger, two cognitive scientists who study memory and learning, collaborated with a storyteller named Brown to write the book *Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning*. They claim that people generally go about learning in the wrong ways, and they offer the six science-based study tips for learning presented below (McDaniel, Roediger & Brown, 2014).

1. Choose active practice over review. Practice retrieving information you’re learning from memory rather than rereading your text or reviewing instructional material. Recalling what you’ve learned makes the learning stronger and more easily recalled later (McDaniel, Roediger & Brown, 2014).

2. Space out your practice sessions and allow time between them. Cramming may lead to fast learning, but it also results in rapid forgetting. Spaced practice helps embed learning in long-term memory (McDaniel, Roediger & Brown, 2014).

3. Sleep is really important, so get plenty of it. When you’re asleep memories consolidate, and this may improve retrieval of learned information. All-nighters are not a good way to study; nothing good comes out of being sleep-deprived (McDaniel, Roediger & Brown, 2014).

4. Switch study topics instead of focusing for a long period of time on one subject. If you have exams coming up on anatomy and physiology, the concepts of geriatric nursing, and the care of the chronically ill, it’s better to study all of these topics on each day rather than only studying one subject per day (McDaniel, Roediger & Brown, 2014).

5. Create practice tests and complete them as you study. Doing so allows you to practice retrieving information from memory, making the pathways to the learning stronger; you’ll be able to recall it more easily when you need it in the future. Doing so also allows you to assess what you know and what you don’t know, so you can focus your studying (McDaniel, Roediger & Brown, 2014).

6. Write your notes by hand rather than typing them on your computer. When typing, you tend to do so without thinking about what you’re typing. When you handwrite your notes, you do so more slowly and think about the material as you write it (McDaniel, Roediger & Brown, 2014).

In her review of the book *Make It Stick*, DeHart (2014) says that research shows that the act of retrieval makes learning stick far better than regular re-exposure to the original materials. Having to work at retrieval leads to stronger learning and retention. When learning is difficult and the mind has to work harder to recall information, the memory is actually strengthened. Flash cards, practice tests, and self-quizzing are good ways to practice information retrieval to enhance learning (deHart, 2014).

If your study habits are keeping you from being successful, you should consider trying some of these science-based methods, as it’s the retrieval practice that makes the learning stick.

References
