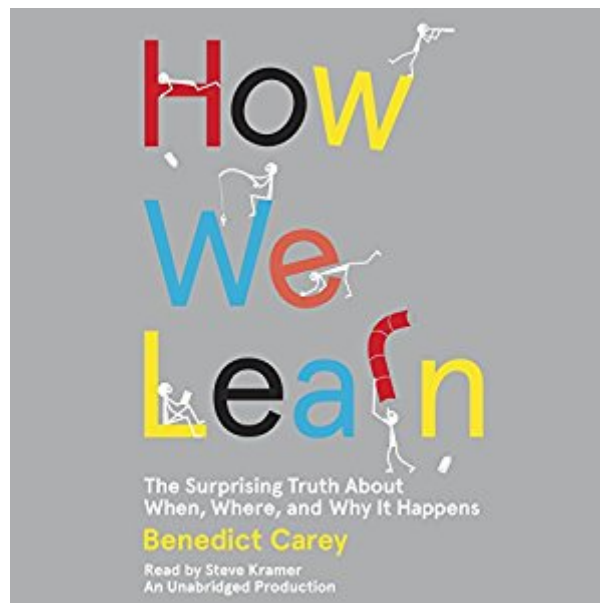




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# **How We Learn: The Surprising Truth About When, Where, And Why It Happens**



## Synopsis

In the tradition of *The Power of Habit* and *Thinking, Fast and Slow* comes a practical, playful, and endlessly fascinating guide to what we really know about learning and memory today - and how we can apply it to our own lives. From an early age, it is drilled into our heads: Restlessness, distraction, and ignorance are the enemies of success. We're told that learning is all self-discipline, that we must confine ourselves to designated study areas, turn off the music, and maintain a strict ritual if we want to ace that test, memorize that presentation, or nail that piano recital. But what if almost everything we were told about learning is wrong? And what if there was a way to achieve more with less effort? In *How We Learn*, award-winning science reporter Benedict Carey sifts through decades of education research and landmark studies to uncover the truth about how our brains absorb and retain information. What he discovers is that, from the moment we are born, we are all learning quickly, efficiently, and automatically; but in our zeal to systematize the process we have ignored valuable, naturally enjoyable learning tools like forgetting, sleeping, and daydreaming. Is a dedicated desk in a quiet room really the best way to study? Can altering your routine improve your recall? Are there times when distraction is good? Is repetition necessary? Carey's search for answers to these questions yields a wealth of strategies that make learning more a part of our everyday lives - and less of a chore. In *How We Learn*, Benedict Carey shows us how to exploit its quirks to our advantage.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Benedict Carey's "How We Learn" is focused on the process of enhancing and exercising our memories in order to achieve positive results in memorization. He goes in depth in helping his readers enhance their memories through several techniques, in order to register, store and retrieve information. Most of us are not aware that our brains are capable of so much, but Benedict Carey makes the process look easy. Some of his techniques range from beginners techniques, to more advanced. I pretty much have the beginners techniques down pat; I would like to divulge into the more advanced techniques, as enhancing my memory has become a number one priority in my life. Repetition, according to Benedict, is a vital part in helping us to enhance the memory. We must train our brains, in a way, so that certain things we may forget become more and more routine to us. For example, I sometimes forget to lock all the doors in my house before going to sleep. If I am aware of this and practice locking the doors each and every night, soon enough it will become routine to me and I'll no longer forget to do it. I read this book, in conjunction with Greg Fosters book, "Maximizing Brain Control : Unleash The Genius In You", and I'm starting to feel more confident and knowledgeable in learning about the human brain and how to store and retrieve information. Both are excellent resources and combined, can truly work wonders for you if you take them serious and truly want to enhance your brain capacity. Good Habits is a key technique both books teach. If you can associate certain things with something you are more familiar with, you are more likely to start remembering as time goes on. Problem Solving is a third technique in which Benedict explains. If you can train your brain to solve the problem that need to be completed, we also learn the upside of distraction. He also provides dietary advice that can help to improve our memory. Most of us would not think or believe that sleep actually plays a vital role in our brain function and memorization, but it does. Something as simple as making small changes in our lifestyle can actually enhance our memories.

There's plenty of information here to work with. How to be a better learner seems to be a big trend in recent books. In the past couple of months I've read Fluent Forever (about language learning) and A Mind For Numbers (about being a good student, particularly in math and science) and they've all been released at the same time. They're also all, I'm very happy to say, strongly grounded in real research, rather than just making up some interesting-sounding notions about what might work (I have certainly seen books that did that...) I would have to say that someone who wants to be a great student ASAP is probably better off reading A Mind For Numbers first. That book takes you by the hand and leads you through the ideas about what you need to DO a lot more specifically. It makes very frequent references to research, but it's plainly written with the intention of being a guide for

people who are taking and really need to hone in on exactly what to do NOW, because there are tests coming up. It leads you through the material by the hand, pretty much, asking you questions and reminding you to stop and think about what you've read. It also has a (free) online MOOC through Coursera to go with it that covers/reinforces the same material. Fluent Forever, in its effort to teach people how to learn languages, makes use of some of the same research, but shapes it to its topic. It offers a sort of general idea of how you should proceed, but the emphasis is on giving you a basic plan and just enough understanding of the research so that you can make good decisions about how to move forward with it. I feel like How We Learn is a little farther down the spectrum in that same direction. Most of its emphasis is on teaching you the research (some of which is the same research cited by the other two), with an assumption that you'll be able to make reasonable decisions about how to put it into practice. So he goes over exactly why it is NOT a good idea to learn a new math trick by doing 50 problems in a row that use that trick. He touches on how it can be put into practice, but it isn't something he dwells on. This vs A Mind for Numbers is sort of like... one being a professor who teaches key points but assumes that the students are capable of drawing some reasonable conclusions on their own, and the other being a professor who strives to touch on every single possible issue that might be of importance. It's a very different style. For someone who's actually writing a paper on learning or something of that nature, I suspect this will be more valuable. For someone who is actively taking classes or trying to learn a language, I'd say read either A Mind for Numbers or Fluent Forever first, because they'll get you going on making progress faster. Then, it certainly wouldn't hurt to come back to review some of the concepts and generally deepen your understanding overall by reading How We Learn. (If you're not taking classes and you just love teaching yourself new things, you might want to skip A Mind for Numbers. It puts a lot of emphasis on things like dealing with procrastination, which is very valuable, but not really a core issue if you're learning for pleasure and there aren't really any deadlines to speak of.)

If you want more in depth and authoritative information about learning, go to the NRCs website on education. Otherwise this is a pleasant overview but somehow incomplete. I would have rated the book higher if the author had not interjected his own theories here and there, except in the conclusion.

Well written book that compiles recent research in the field. There are many other books that do similar things, but this one is my favorite. It is about time that more people in the education system, will be aware of the findings mentioned in this book.

Four stars and not five simply because of the lack of a bibliography, something that would have been helpful and is present in other popular books summing up recent science-based investigations into cognition and how cognition factors within learning, see, for example, *Guitar Zero*. Carey offers a fluid explanation that counters a great many long-held, yet erroneous notions about how to support learning, for example, setting aside a study space, practicing on one aspect or deficit at a time, or using testing strictly as a measure of success. I would recommend *How We Learn* highly as a handbook for college students committed to their educations and as a guidebook for educators wanting to improve student learning.

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