



FASTR Learning

How can you put all this research to work for you on a daily basis? We've consolidated a number of basic principles about how the brain learns into **FASTR**, an acronym for Focus, Associate, Study, Talk, and Reinforce.

<h1>F</h1>	<p>Focus attention. If you want to learn something well or remember it later, pay attention! Reduce distractions, put aside other tasks (the emails can wait) and keep your focus on what you want to learn.</p>
<h1>A</h1>	<p>Associate. One way to boost learning is to associate new information with information you already know well (and which is therefore already encoded into your synapses). Think of it as piggy-backing new knowledge onto old. The more associations you can make, the more the neural circuitry serving the new information will overlap with the circuitry serving the established memories, giving your brain a better way to dredge up the new when required. Synapses that play together, stay together!</p>
<h1>S</h1>	<p>Study it. Practice, practice, practice. Keep exposing yourself to the new information you want to remember, in as many different formats as possible. Read about it, write about it, visualize it, listen to it, and...</p>
<h1>T</h1>	<p>Talk about it. Repeating something, aloud or silently, triggers different representations of the information in your brain. This is why study groups work: the act of discussing a concept or information helps solidify it in your brain. You can literally say to yourself, for example, "I am putting my meeting file in my briefcase."</p>
<h1>R</h1>	<p>Reinforce it. Each subsequent exposure to something strengthens underlying synaptic connections. With enough repetition and reinforcement, new synapses will be added to support the encoding of new information, making the memory trace in the brain even stronger.</p>

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FASTR On the Job

Think about a situation in which you are trying to absorb a lot of new information – a tutorial about a new software system or a briefing from an important new client. You can apply FASTR to any such situation.

<h1>F</h1>	<p>Focus attention. Clear your schedule as much as possible to enable you to focus on the task at hand. Hold your calls. Leave the iPhone behind, or at least turn it off. Maintain your focus by summarizing the new information every few minutes, either verbally or as written notes.</p>
<h1>A</h1>	<p>Associate the new information with what you already know. Think about how it relates to your job. Consider real-world situations where you might need to use it. Draw similarities to your previous experience whenever possible. Create metaphors to familiar situations. The new information will overlap with the circuitry serving the established memories, giving your brain a better way to dredge up the new when required. Synapses that play together, stay together!</p>
<h1>S</h1>	<p>Study it. Put aside time later the same day and on following days to study your notes. If they are hand-written, type them up. Ask the speaker to share the slides, and review them against your notes. Ask follow-up questions to clarify or expand on points of interest. Get a good night's sleep, then study the information again.</p>
<h1>T</h1>	<p>Talk about it. At the end of a learning session, identify three to five take-away messages, and talk about them. If you've got a recording device, record key points so you can review them as needed. Engage fellow learners in debate and discussion on the topic. Debrief your boss or colleagues on what you've learned.</p>
<h1>R</h1>	<p>Reinforce it. To integrate the new information, keep reinforcing it. Make it part of your routine over time, not just for a day or two. Re-read your notes regularly, take another look at the materials, or listen to your tape recording again. Explore new ways to apply the knowledge. Pass useful information along to others by summarizing key points.</p>

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