

Learning to learn

A seminar series on the strategies behind effective learning.

Creating good habits

...and breaking bad ones

Myths around learning

Learning is a talent. You're either good at it or not.

Learning is a skill that anyone can improve.

Intelligence is innate. You're either smart or you're not.

Genetics accounts for about 50% of intelligence; your environment influences the rest.

I'm a 60% student. Even when I work hard I don't do better. *Grades are poor indicators of your ability and working hard doesn't mean much if you're working ineffectively.*

What are habits?

Habits are automatic actions we take without much deliberation.

Habits are algorithms operating in the background that power our lives. Some studies suggest that 40% of what we do during a normal day consists of habits.

Habits reinforce your identity; the stories we tell ourselves about who we are are informed by the things we do, and many of the things we do are habitual.

Why focus on habits?

A change in your habits leads to a change in behaviour. A change in your behaviour (*what* you do) leads to a change in identity (*who* you are).

Habits are *force multipliers*. Habits are the difference between those who are good and those who are great.

Habits precede outcomes. By focusing on the outcome you may lose sight of the small steps you need to take to reach it.

The principles of habit building apply to almost any aspect of your life that you'd like to improve.

<h1>Goals</h1>	<h1>Habits</h1>
<h2>Long-term</h2> <p>“I want to pass my final exams”</p>	<h2>Short-term</h2> <p>“I want to review my notes today”</p>
<h2>Abstract</h2> <p>“I want to be better at anatomy”</p>	<h2>Concrete</h2> <p>“I want to describe the intra-articular surface of the tibiofemoral joint without referring to notes”</p>
<h2>Focus on product (end-point)</h2> <p>“I want to pass my final exams”</p>	<h2>Focus on process (continuous)</h2> <p>“I want to be a lifelong learner”</p>
<h2>External factors</h2> <p>“I don’t get on with my lecturer”</p>	<h2>Internal factors</h2> <p>“I am in control of my habits”</p>

How to create a new habit

THE 3 R's OF HABIT FORMATION



Where to look for cues

Cues are triggers that you can recognise:

- **Time:** “At 16:00 every day I will...”
- **Place:** “When I get home I will...”
- **Preceding events:** “When I check my email I also tend to check...”
- **People:** “I notice that I tend to smoke when I’m with..”
- **Emotions:** “When I feel down/bored I tend to...”

Rewards

The rewards for good habits are in the future but the costs are felt today e.g. working on the assignment now means you miss out on socialising but cruising the exam only happens at the end of the year.

The rewards for bad habits are today but the cost is in the future e.g. watching a movie tonight feels good but cramming before the exam is stressful and probably won't work out well.

This makes it much easier to be demotivated and stop working on good habits.

Making it easier to create good habits

Make the cue obvious. “When I arrive home after university the first thing I’ll do is [review my notes].”

Make the routine easy. “I’d like to spend an hour doing this, but I’m going to start with 15 minutes”.

Make the reward attractive. “When I’m done reviewing my notes, I’ll [go for a run]”.

How to break a bad habit

1. First find the cue (What is it that's triggering your negative behaviour?) then remove it.
2. Make the routine difficult.
3. Identify the reward: What is it that reinforces the desire to act in this negative way?

Experiment with changing the cues that trigger your negative behaviour.

Is there a different way you can get the reward, or can you substitute one reward for another?

Tips for creating new habits

1. Focus on one habit at a time.
2. Try to implement your new habit for a month.
3. Your new habit should be very easy to complete.
4. Experiment with habit stacking, which is a way to use habits to trigger other habits.
5. Look for keystone habits, which are habits that may lead to other other lifestyle changes e.g. a daily “exercise” habit may lead to changes in eating.
6. Announce your intention to change your habit.
7. Track your progress by creating habit streaks.
8. Set up your environment to avoid distractions.

Examples of habits you might want to try

- Get 8 hours of sleep a night.
- Review your notes from class every day for 1 hour.
- Read for pleasure for 30 minutes every day.
- Go for a 30 minute run, 3 times a week.
- Ask the lecturer 1 question in every class, every day.
- Attend every lecture.
- Limit yourself to 1 hour on social media every day.

Tools you'll need to change your habits

There are two main features of any system you use to create new habits:

- A to do list
- A calendar

Mobile apps you may find useful

- Todoist, Any.do
- Loop
- Calendar app

Resources

Clear, J. (2018). Atomic habits.

Duhigg, C. (2012). The power of habit.

Fogg, B.J. (2019). Tiny habits: The small changes that change everything.

Moving forward...

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- Weekly updates and short inputs.
- Next topic and seminar details.

Website

- One page PDF summary for printing.
- Expanded version of these slides on the website with links to additional readings.

Next topic: How to focus and avoid distraction