

13 Ways to Develop Self-Directed Learning and Learn Faster



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Learning alone with self-directed learning is not a simple task. It takes trying out new study methods, knowing how you learn, and the motivation to keep going.

While this all sounds simple on paper, it's important to note people's overall mood towards learning. For many people, it's been years since they last picked up a book, let alone a textbook. I wouldn't be surprised if most people stopped learning seriously after university or college.

It's good now that you are focusing on your learning anew, because once you delve into what learning is, you'll realize that school learning wasn't the most optimal.

Self-directed learning can be a great tool to help you continue your lifelong learning. We'll discuss what it is and some tips to help you.

What Is Self-Directed Learning?

Self-directed learning, at its core, is taking learning into your own hands and growing from it. It's a technique that's drastically different from what's taught in most schools. In other words, it's a highly effective technique that anyone can use and would be great in a school setting.

Here's Tanmay Vora's 3L's of self-directed learning:⁽¹⁾



In fact, there is one school in the US that can attest to that through theory and practice: Brisbane Independent School or BIS. Because the school wasn't restricted by Federal Curriculums—which are lackluster at best—they could adopt this form of learning.

This push for self-directed learning came from Jennifer Haynes, who started teaching at BIS in the 1990s. From there, the buzzword at the time evolved into a curriculum program that emphasizes seven characteristics:

- Playfulness
- Autonomy
- Internalized Evaluation
- Openness to Experience
- Intrinsic Motivation
- Self Acceptance
- Flexibility

From those seven characteristics, Haynes noted:

“These characteristics are planned into our curriculum and each student is tracked on a continuum of development. It is wonderful to see how a student can go from needing a teacher to help them even come up with an idea for a project and then observe them in their final years developing planning and implementing a project...They learn how great it feels to develop their own idea and most importantly how to complete the task without anyone standing over them to get it done.”^[2]

Characteristics of a Self-Directed Learner

The students at BIS give a birds-eye view of some of the characteristics of a self-directed learner. Exploring further, we'll find more, especially when we consider the methods I mentioned above as ways of improving this learning style.

From those methods, many papers in education research have emerged over the years showing all kinds of positive side-effects of this method, including for adult education.

First, self-directed learning includes people taking the initiative when diagnosing their learning and building from there. One study noted that when this happens, people uncover and grow their grit and perseverance, and improve their intrinsic motivation and integrity.^[3]

Find Out Your Style of Learning to Learn Faster

Take our FREE assessment to find out your learning style and maximize your learning skills.

Second, students feel more empowered through self-learning. With programs moving to the internet,^[4] we can see this as a form of self-directed learning. After all, you need to pace yourself when it comes to online courses and problem-based learning.

Thirdly, people who take up self-directed learning develop other helpful skills. They'll have an easier time formulating learning goals and identifying their own intrinsic motivation. After all, these sorts of skills can apply to other areas outside of learning.

For example, we all need to set goals if we want to grow and enrich our business, career, and life. Learning how to set meaningful goals that we are excited to achieve means more than the act of setting a goal we don't care about.

Some other characteristics of these learners are:

Highly Reflective

It takes a lot to know your interests and how to motivate yourself. As a result, many of these learners spend time in their heads evaluating and reflecting.

Efficient

From effective learning to effective motivation, these individuals become more efficient with their learning.

Supportive

Being this type of learner means you need to value collaboration and teamwork. This teaches you to seek help and guidance and to offer help when needed. They work better in a team dynamic because of this.

A Greater Sense of Responsibility

Ultimately, in self-directed learning, individuals take the initiative and decide when, how, and what to learn. This sense of responsibility is especially important in the 21st century, when education seems to have stalled in its progress.

More Inquisitive

This teaching method encourages us to ask why and to not settle with “I don’t know” as the answer. As a result, we learn to ask the more important and impactful questions that spark discussion, discovery, and learning.

What’s amazing about self-directed learning is that we can adopt it in our own lives.

How to Develop Self-Directed Learning

Developing this strategy isn’t that hard. For most people, it needs to be taught explicitly, but the following ways will help in growing and learning this strategy.

1. Identify Learning Goals

You can never achieve anything unless you’ve envisioned it. Identify what you wish to learn first. Set specific learning goals that you will be able to measure over time.

2. Question the Significance

Make a habit of not taking everything at face value. Always have a cat-like curiosity and ask questions that make you care about the answer. Dive past obvious answers with “why” and “how” questions, and devote yourself to finding the answers.

3. Find Challenges

Challenges, while uncomfortable at first, can be exciting and rewarding. Find a challenge related to a problem you care about solving. Overcoming it will then feel meaningful and will push you to continue learning.

For example, if you want to learn a new language, challenge yourself to read one book in that language each month and watch how it becomes easier over time.

You can learn more about how to train yourself to crave learning in this video:

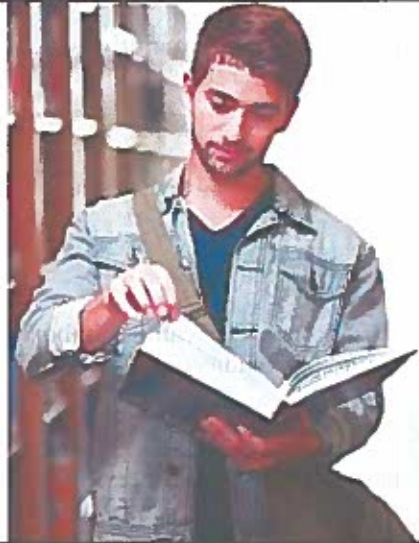
TRAIN YOUR BRAIN TO CRAVE LEARNING

Lifhack Fast Track Class

Friday Oct 9, 2020 at 1pm ET



Hosted by Ally Kramer
Resident Lifehack Coach



4. Check Your Learning Process

Learning is better when you've set your own learning standards. Regardless of grades, measure your progress against personal learning goals. Schools teach us to use grades. You'll have to come up with a more meaningful way to measure your learning^[5].

5. Understand Your Learning Approach

There are tons of resources to help you identify [learning styles](#), but do you really know what your style is?

Take a moment to look at the format and medium of your learning approach and change it around from time to time as you engage in self-directed learning. Most people are strong in several learning styles, and they can often further develop those they're weakest in. Experiment to see what works in the long term.

6. Uncover the Background of a Topic

Get to know the topic you are learning by checking the background of the topic. Read articles you find interesting, or watch TED Talks related to topics on your learning list.

7. Cultivate Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is motivation driven from internal rewards. It seems like a simple concept, but many people struggle with it. Fortunately, it can be learned. One form of it is sharing what you learned with others.

Try to avoid being hard on yourself if you're looking to cultivate intrinsic motivation. Too much self-criticism will put you off from continuing your learning journey. Keep it as positive as possible and cultivate gratitude and appreciation for all the effort you're putting into your education.

8. Making Something out of What You Learned

A song, a journal entry, a picture...These are examples of things that you can create from what you learned. Not only does this help solidify what you learn, but it gives you something to look forward to. This is also great for kinesthetic learners!

9. Leverage Time

Sometimes we get busy and don't have time to learn, but that lack of time is more of a reason to [leverage the time](#) we do have.

Take your thirty-minute lunch breaks to eat and squeeze in a learning session. If you go to the gym, listen to a podcast or an audiobook while you're on the treadmill.

10. Create a Topic List

Think of a topic list as a bucket list of things you want to learn about. These can be broad topics or narrow ones. These lists can help you in creating goals and working to achieve them.

11. Value Your Progress Over Your Performance

We never truly stop learning. There will always be tiny bits of information or views we are exposed to every day. However, when you want to actively learn, focus more on the stimulation of learning over your actual performance.

12. Have Realistic Learning Goals

Self-directed learning is built on a system that we create. To ensure the system is sound, you want to make sure everything is set within your own limits. The last thing you want is to feel discouraged from learning.

Try to start small and work your way up. For example, if you want to [learn how to code](#), don't expect to be able to build a fully functioning website in a month. Plan to learn enough to alter text and colors in the first month as a more realistic goal.

13. Build a Network of Learning Colleagues

Have a group of people that you can collaborate and connect with. This group of people will push you to learn more and can give you an outlet for when you want to talk about what you've learned. Best of all, this group can be either offline or online.

Final Thoughts

Self-directed learning is the key to having a more enriching learning experience. While everyone's taste for learning seems to have diminished, it is due to an old and ineffective system—a system that doesn't encourage deeper learning or support students to set higher learning goals they care about.

Self-directed learning is important because it teaches people to be more independent and responsible individuals. They develop skills to be internally motivated, self-sufficient, to ask meaningful and impactful questions, and more.

Now is the best time to get into self-directed learning and to fall in love with learning again!

