

How to use the Feynman Technique

What it is

Explain a concept in plain, simple words, like you're teaching a beginner, and wherever you get stuck is exactly what you don't understand yet.

Named after physicist Richard Feynman, who said if you can't explain something simply, you don't understand it well enough.

When to use it

When you're learning something new and want to know if you actually get it or just recognize it.

Steps

1. **Name the topic.** What are you trying to learn?
2. **Explain it simply.** Write it out like you're teaching a total beginner. No jargon allowed.
3. **Find the gaps.** Where did you get stuck, or use a big word you couldn't actually explain?
4. **Simplify again.** Go back and rewrite the tricky part in even plainer words.

Common mistake

Using the textbook's own words instead of your own. That just hides what you don't understand.

Pairs with

First Principles Thinking and Occam's Razor.

Example: compound interest

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The topic

Compound interest

Explain it simply

When you save money, the bank pays you a little extra called interest. If you leave that interest in the account, next year you earn interest on your original money and on the interest you already earned. Over time that snowball effect grows your money faster than you'd expect.

Where I got stuck

The exact math formula behind it

The difference between simple and compound interest

Simplify it again

It's interest earning interest on itself, like a snowball rolling downhill and picking up more snow.

Feynman Technique Worksheet

Date: _____

The topic

Explain it simply

Where I got stuck

Simplify it again