



When Learning Feels Easy—but Doesn't Last

Based on [Make It Stick: The Science of Successful Learning](#)
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Purpose

To help teachers understand why durable learning requires effort and to support instructional shifts that promote long-term retention and transfer rather than short-term performance.

Key Understanding

Learning that feels easy is often fleeting. Make It Stick explains that strategies such as rereading, highlighting, and massed practice can create an illusion of learning without supporting long-term understanding.

Instead, durable learning is strengthened through practices that require effort, including retrieval practice, spaced learning, interleaving, and feedback. When instruction intentionally incorporates these principles, students are more likely to retain information, apply learning in new contexts, and build meaningful understanding over time.

Teacher Reflection Questions

- Do my lessons prioritize student performance during practice or long-term retention of learning?
- How often are students asked to retrieve information from memory rather than reread or review it?
- Am I providing opportunities for spaced practice rather than clustering learning into a single lesson?
- Do students experience productive struggle during learning—or is instruction designed to feel easy?
- Which students benefit most when learning requires effortful thinking?

What to Look for in Students

- Improved retention of learning over time
- Greater ability to apply learning in new situations
- Increased confidence when recalling information without prompts
- More flexible thinking across related concepts
- Willingness to engage in effortful learning tasks

These patterns indicate that instruction is supporting learning that lasts, not just performance in the moment.

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