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MIND BREW

Office of Student Success

Taking a note from the experts: How consistent and deliberate practice delivers results.

THE LEARNING SPECIALIST TEAM

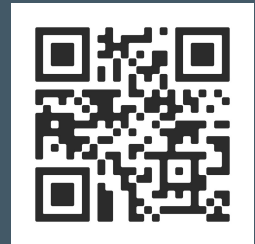
Reflecting on the first week of classes, it seems the consistent theme amongst students was the feeling of being overwhelmed by the sheer abundance of new material they have to retain. How am I supposed to absorb all of this material? There is so much to preview. It never seems like I have enough time to review. How am I supposed to do well on tests? The list continues on. Thankfully, performance psychologists have insight into how you can perform effectively based on research conducted on experts.

Researcher Anders Ericsson was one of the pioneers who investigated the idea of deliberate practice as a critical component of expert performance. Prior to Ericsson, traditional views of skills acquisition and performance largely centered on the idea of talent. We often hear students comment about their peers just "knowing" the material right off the bat or just being gifted at learning. However, as Ericsson and his colleagues explored the habits of experts, they found that personnel who achieved performance mastery were the ones who sustained deliberate practice over time (Ericsson et al., 1993).

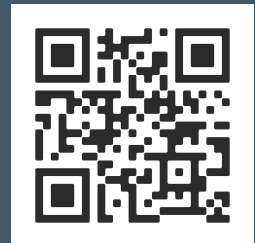
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Current Cognitive Research in Media

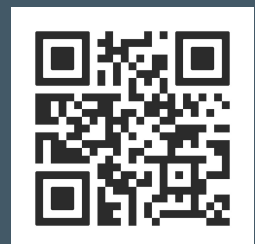
Dealing with Imposter Syndrome
(APA's Speaking of Psychology Podcast)



Applying Growth Mindset (APA's Speaking of Psychology Podcast)



The Psychology of Performance
(APA's Speaking of Psychology Podcast)



So what can we take away from this finding? First and foremost, learning is a gradual process not unlike skills acquisition among experts. It requires time, deliberate effort, and sustained practice. There will be concepts that you will not understand on your first try. It will take you out of your comfort zone. This is a natural part of the learning process. Hence, lumping all of your content review for the end of the week may not suffice for long term learning and retention. Furthermore, it may lead to anxiety, procrastination, and frustration. Shorter, focused study sessions will not only facilitate long term retention, but help build that sustained practice. Remember, consistent effort to conceptualize and understand a topic that is difficult is the first step towards performance mastery.

However, it is not the only step. One of the key components of Ericsson's research that is often overlooked is the idea of feedback. Here is the thing, if you don't know what you are doing right or what you are doing wrong, you will never understand where you are at. If you don't understand where you stand, you do not know how to improve. Students should be proactively asking for feedback on their performance from their instructors, directors, and mentors. This not only helps with understanding where you are at, but also where to focus your attention while you learn so you can grow as medical professionals.

It is important to acknowledge that the idea of deliberate practice does not exist in a vacuum. Deliberate practice requires both grit and a growth mindset. Medical school can be demanding and frustrating. When learning is difficult, approach it from the stance of while you may not understand all the material yet, you have the capability to master the material through deliberate practice and active problem solving.

Remember, learning in medical school is a marathon, not a sprint. You should be thinking about the long term goal of applying your learning to develop performance mastery. It begins with consistent and deliberate practice. It develops through feedback and assessment. Most importantly, mastery is determined by your approach to it. Grit down and trust the process, even if it means initially struggling. Lastly, your learning specialist team is here to facilitate and support you in that process every step of the way. Please reach out to us with any questions regarding the learning process.

References

Ericsson, K. A., Krampe, R. T., & Tesch-Römer, C. (1993). The role of deliberate practice in the acquisition of expert performance. *Psychological review*, 100(3), 363.

**"Excellence is
doing ordinary
things
extraordinarily
well"**

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