

# The Frustration Barrier

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One reader asked me this question. How can you handle learning something when you're looking at it and you just don't get it? You just don't get the material you're trying to understand. Now, this is a common problem. I call it the Frustration Barrier. This is the barrier that occurs whenever you're trying to learn something new or that's sufficiently outside of your zone of comfort or your prerequisite, that you actually feel very physically bad about learning it because you really don't understand it.

Now, I don't really have a specific tactic of this is exactly how you scale over it, other than just finding great examples, great teachers, great educational material to help you understand the idea, but it's really a psychological ability that you're trying to build here. It's not just a tactic of how do you learn the material when you're in this position, it's a psychological skill of building the self discipline to not give up in that situation.

So, the best method I can think of for handling this kind of ambiguity, this confusion when you're approaching a new subject, is what I call the 15-minute method. And, basically, when you're learning something, and you're staring at it and you really don't get it and you feel like giving up, so wait until you get to the point where you're sort of like, "I cannot take this anymore. I have to give up." and commit to going an extra 15 minutes to try to understand the idea. So, put in an extra 15 minutes.

Now, the 15 minute point is sort of arbitrary. It depends on the level of comprehension and what kind of scale we're talking about. Obviously, 15 minutes to understanding an entire course of material isn't going to be enough. But, trying to understand one idea, it might be. But, the main idea is that when you feel like giving up, when you feel like quitting, to put in that extra little effort to scale the Frustration Barrier.

What's even more important is that you develop the ability to do this repeatedly. And to force yourself to be in the situation where you are confused, because the more that you are in that situation where you're at the edge of your comfort level, the edge of your incompetence, the more you can get comfortable with being uncomfortable. The more you can get, "Okay" with being confused about something. Because, when you're in that state where you understand that you don't understand it, but you're okay with that for the moment, and you're going to put effort in continuously to try to understand it, then that skill allows you to learn subjects. Because, my honest opinion is though a lot of people get stuck in a subject, so they will be learning a complicated technical skill and they will get stuck where they don't understand how it works and they will sub-optimize, they will try to just learn it too quickly and not get through that deep understanding and then switch to rote memorization.

So, if this sounds familiar to you, maybe this is a circumstance you've been in where you don't understand the idea, so you switch to rote memorization. Again, my technique is to invest, when you

feel like giving up, commit to investing a little bit more time either in that specific moment, so 15 minutes in that particular moment to memorize the idea, or a few more days if it's in the context of a few weeks you've been learning something. And, commit to putting in a little bit more effort, because if you can get used to that discomfort, you can go further with ideas and you'll be less likely to fall back on rote memorization because, the initial work of understanding ideas holistically, understanding them deeply, is actually more. It's more work than rote memorization because it's less straightforward, requires more creativity, and requires more mental stamina.

But, once you get through that, once you understand the idea and have it in place deeply, you don't need as much reminders. It clicks into place and you can just get it for all the exams and tests and life situations where you're going to encounter it in the future. So, try that technique. Commit to putting in the extra effort once you feel like quitting the idea, and focus on trying to learn the idea deeply and getting through that Frustration Barrier, rather than side-stepping it and resorting to rote memorization.