

The is from study section 3 of the course, Teaching Principles and Methods

The Learning Process

The process of learning is complex and amazing. God gave each person a unique brain that can assimilate new information and store it in various places, and then interconnect that information with information already stored there in other locations. The brain is the most complex matter in the universe. As a teacher, you need to understand how this process works. How does a fact go into the brain and come out preparing that person to accomplish a skill with his hands? While we can only touch the surface on such a complex process, we need to understand how people learn and the best ways to make that process simple and effective. That's what we are going to learn today.

The Learning Process

If you really want to be a really great teacher, you must understand how the learning process takes place. While we can give you some general principles about the process, each person is unique and the process may vary from individual to individual. Some people learn through tactile means; they have to feel and sense what they learn. Others can learn fine with just hearing the information. So while these general learning principles are somewhat universal, you may have to tailor your method of presentation based on the students you teach.



If you don't understand how people learn new things, then you will never be an effective teacher or preacher of God's Word. Unfortunately, most teachers or preachers "talk" the information to the audience. They utilize the **lecture method**. But did you know that the lecture method is probably the least effective way to communicate information to people? It's no wonder that people can sit in a church for years and listen to the pastor preach yet know very little about the Bible! That's because they are not being challenged to learn. They are just sitting and soaking, but little is getting into the brain! To start our study, we want to learn how people learn new things. If we really understand the learning process, then perhaps we can incorporate some new ideas into our lessons that might increase the retention of the audience.

CHECK THIS OUT! **How we Learn**



1. Motivation

Before someone can learn, they have to want to listen and incorporate the information. It comes from their desire to learn. If they are not interested, they probably won't hear much of what you say. When you begin a lesson, the students' minds can be anywhere. They may be thinking about an event that happened yesterday, or plans for after church. You will find that in a class of 20 people, all 20 minds will be somewhere else other than ready to study the Bible.



So the first thing you have to do is take them from where they are to where you want them to be. You have to capture their interest in the topic of your lesson and somehow motivate them enough to focus on what you are about to introduce. How do you do this? There are a variety of ways.

You could do a demonstration using some props to start the class that would perk their interest. You could play a song on an electronic device and have them pay attention to the words. You do a dramatization using a couple of people in the class as volunteers. There are an infinite number of things you can do; you just have to plan carefully how you will accomplish this. You have to do something that will capture their minds.



This is called a HOOK. When you go fishing, you may have a plain hook on the end of your fishing pole. But you have to put some bait on the hook so that it will be more appealing for the fish to bite the hook. With any lesson, you have to create an appeal. You have to give your class a desire to pay attention to your lesson for the next few minutes as you share God's Word with them.

Your hook is planned and should be a part of your strategy when creating a plan for your lesson. It should be related in some way to the topic of the lesson or Scripture. And by the time you have employed your hook, every student should be ready and wanting to move forward into the lesson. An effective hook will do just that. If you have created a good hook, you have successfully motivated your students to want to learn what comes next.

You need to know that your hook, while it may take only a few minutes of the lesson, is probably the most important part of your lesson plan. If you get up and start your lesson with, "Today's lesson is about the Fruit of the Spirit..." you probably will find that your class will dial you out. But if you suddenly revealed a large bowl of different kinds of fruit, each with a label of one of the fruits of the Spirit and you start eating the banana labeled, "Love", you may find a different response as you move forward with your lesson. Your lesson will rise or fall on your hook or introduction.

2. Interaction

Here is a very important factor in understanding the learning process:

"The more involved the student is with the topic at hand, the more learning will take place."

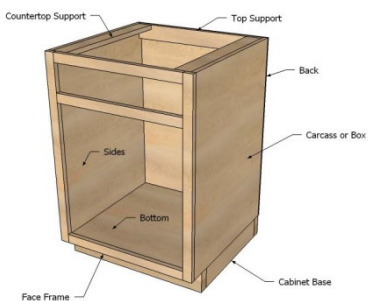
If you get up and lecture through your lesson giving your three points, most students will have a difficult time next week telling you what your lesson was about, let alone stating back to you your three points. Did you know that a



person will be able to incorporate and learn about 10% of what they **HEAR** through their ears? So don't be surprised if your presentation is nothing more than a monotone talk for 45 minutes that most of your students will gain very little.

If, however, you decide to create some graphics to illustrate what you are teaching, so they can **HEAR** and **SEE** what you are talking about, they will retain about 30% of your lesson. They probably will remember what the lesson was about and even remember the main points, especially if there was a graphic that helped them see and hear the points.

But the real game changer is this: If your students **HEAR** the information, and you create a way for them to **SEE** illustrations of what you are telling them, and you somehow incorporate something in your lesson where they have to **DO** something in response to what they are learning, you will find that a student will remember around 90% of the material. Amazing, isn't it?



Here is an illustration of this principle. You want to teach your students how to build a cabinet. You can tell them about the process of selecting materials, purchasing, cutting up their materials, assembling the cabinet, and final finish. Do you think after even going over the process several times, that any student in your class could build a cabinet?

So you step up the process. You demonstrate how to build a cabinet. The entire class watches you cut out the parts and assemble it. You demonstrate how to make the doors and how to attach them to the frames. When you are done, you still will not have a students who really know how to build a cabinet. The students may have a little better idea, but most of them would fail at building a cabinet on their own.

Your best approach is for you to make them cut out the pieces of the cabinet, stopping along the way, giving them instruction and showing them how, but letting them put a cabinet together on their own. If you do it that way, guess what? At the end of the class, the students will know how to build a cabinet.

Did you know that when the effective teacher has completed the class, the students should know how to do what was taught? In fact, that is the real test of an effective (great) teacher. If students can **DO** what you have taught them to **DO**, then you have taught. Otherwise, as the teacher, you have just exercised your mouth.

So a great teacher works very hard at involving his students in the passage at hand, bringing them to the point of doing something about what they are learning. Interaction is the key to retention.

3. Connection

Have you ever noticed that when you meet a brand new person, and he tells you his name, that in a few minutes you have forgotten what his name was? That happens to me all the time. However, if I hear his name after he introduces himself, and I think of someone I know who also has that name, or relate his name to something I've experienced in my mind, then I almost never forget the person's name. That is what connecting is all about. A great teacher has to **connect** new information to information that the student already knows.



Here is how God instructs us to teach:

Isaiah 28:10 *For it is precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little.”* ESV

What this verse is saying is that a great teacher builds new information on the foundation of information that has already been learned by the student. Once the new information is learned and incorporated, then more new information can be built on that structure.

In school we teach mathematics that way. We first learn how to count, then count by 2s, then add numbers, then multiple them, then add variables or unknowns, and pretty soon we teach them how to calculate the moving area under a launched missile (calculus). It sometimes takes years to build new concepts on top of ones that have been incorporated into the minds of our students, but if patient, we will have taught a surgeon how to perform brain surgery or an engineer how to build a skyscraper. It is built one line upon another.

Find out where your student’s foundations are. Where are they in their walk with the Lord? How knowledgeable are they of God’s Word? Then from where you understand they are, you can start adding new and exciting truths from God’s Word that will take them to the next step of spiritual maturity. Previously we discussed knowing and understanding who your students are. That’s why that ingredient to becoming an effective teacher is so important. It is because it gives you a starting point, so you can begin connecting new thoughts to where they are spiritually.

4, Reinforcement

Do you always learn everything you need to know the first time you hear it? Obviously, the answer is NO WAY! I remember when I was in college, I spent many nights of long, hard study, going over and over again the information, so that the next day I could put the correct answer on the test. It’s called cramming. I always had to work hard at learning and remembering the information given in a class. I had to go over and over the ideas in my mind multiple times before it would finally register. In the learning process, that is called reinforcement, or another term is review. Learning doesn’t always happen the first time. It may take multiple reviews before finally it clicks. A great teacher will take his students through the process of walking through previous material over and over again so that it finally takes root in the mind of the students.



During a typical class that I may teach, after a dynamic HOOK, I generally take the students back to what we learned last week. I can ask questions or just go over the information, then ask further questions. I can even ask if anybody incorporated the lesson in his/her life as a testimony. The idea is to retrace the important truths from God’s Word from a previous lesson so that the students rethink those thoughts. When they think the same thoughts again, they are more likely to be retained.

If you really want to be a great teacher, you will learn to review your previous lessons over and over again until the students really know what you have taught them. To teach means the student can do what you have taught them. It’s a process that takes review.

Factor in Attention Spans.

A wise preacher will pay attention to what is about to be taught!!!

People are limited on how long they can listen to you!

God created every person with the ability to concentrate on what you are saying but only for a limited amount of time. This is a God-created trait in every person, and it is called their ATTENTION SPAN. An attention span is the time a person or animal can concentrate and stay focused on what is happening around him, be it a lecture or a video or an event.

For example, dogs can stay focused for about two minutes. Chimpanzees, at around 20 seconds, are worse than rats at concentration, while the attention spans of three other primates—baboons, pig-tailed macaques, and squirrel monkeys—exceeded only bees (the sole study participant that wasn't either a mammal or a bird). Goldfish have an attention span of 9 seconds, sometime longer than most humans!



(<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/2015/02/150225-dogs-memories-animals-chimpanzees-science-mind-psychology/>).

Humans can normally concentrate much longer, depending on their age. Some can concentrate longer than others, so the information about to be presented is an average concentration span. Adults have an average attention span of between 20-35 minutes. Teens average between 10-20 minutes. Children ages 5-6 typically can attend one activity of interest for between 10-15 minutes, whereas a child of four years or younger can concentrate for about 4 minutes times their age. This is not very long, uh?

Why is this important? If you plan to lecture or preach a sermon to adults for around 60 minutes, you need to understand that they can stay with you for about a maximum of 35 minutes. What you say for the last 25 minutes is mostly worthless, because most of your audience went on an imaginary journey somewhere else during that time. Most people will have NO IDEA what you said during the last part of your sermon or lecture.

The key to increasing a person's attention span is based on capturing their interest or attention by getting them excited, engrossed, or inspired. People will tend to pay more attention when they are focused on difficult tasks like playing an instrument or learning to site read music. Seeing or hearing something that supports what they are learning magnifies their concentration and thus, increases attention span. People are much more likely to stay with you when they are hearing and seeing images that support the information you are sharing verbally. That's why audio-visual aids are so important to teachers, lecturers, and preachers.

THIS IS REALLY IMPORTANT!!! The bottom line is this: **You have to deliver your message to the people within the limited time of their ability to concentrate on what you are saying.** The verbosity of your sermon is not a reflection of your ability to preach. A skilled preacher can deliver his message from God within the limits of his congregation's attention spans.

Years ago, I heard a preacher preach the 23rd Psalms in 23 minutes. It was one of the best sermons I have ever heard in my life. This great preacher totally understood this important principle!

Resetting Attention Spans.

Just because God created adult humans with short attention spans of around 25 minutes does not mean that they cannot concentrate much longer on a specific topic. Consider when a person goes to a 2 ½ hour movie! They sit there for that length of time and don't seem to wander at all. Children, whose attention spans are much shorter, can watch an hour-long TV show on the internet (no commercial interruptions) and yet hang in there to the end. How is that possible? They can do that because their attention spans are getting "reset!"

Let's try to understand this process. God made you to be able to direct your entire concentration toward something that intrigues you for about 25 minutes. Then how can you watch a 2 ½ hour movie without breaking your attention? If you study how a movie is made, they have moments of relaxation and moments of tension. An action-packed movie can be exhausting unless they give you a short break between the action. The break is a device to "reset" your concentration on what is happening. It is giving you a rest from your concentration.

When you speak to an audience, you can do the same thing. If you talk for about 20 minutes, you can stop and ask the class a question that requires a response. Immediately, the class will switch gears from concentrating on your message to trying to create an answer to the question. Even if they don't get the opportunity to answer the question, you will effectively "reset" their attention span.

Perhaps you teach for 20 minutes, then stop and demonstrate a point using an object lesson. Say you are talking about patience, then you could stage your "impatience" when your video projector keeps flipping your slides backwards (actually you are doing it but staging it for demonstration purposes).

One time during a long sermon in Zambia, our pastor had an interpreter who helped translate his sermon from English to the local language. The pastor would say a sentence, then the translator would say a sentence. About half-way through the sermon, the pastor stated his point in one sentence, then paused. The translator then spoke about 3 minutes in his language. After his comments, the people all broke out in tremendous laughter. The pastor could not figure out what he said that was so funny, and why it took so long to say his sentence. After the sermon was over, the pastor asked the translator why all the people laughed in the middle of his sermon. The translator replied, "Well, pastor, I noticed that you were losing them, so I told them a joke." The translator actually "reset" the crowd so they could concentrate on the rest of the sermon.

You can use a variety of methods to reset your students. Stopping and standing up will do it. Singing a song will do it. Just changing the method of your presentation will in effect, reset your audience so they can concentrate on what God has for them for much longer periods of time.

Later we will look at a variety of methods to use to teach a lesson. Switching from one method to another usually will reset your audience for another 20-25 minutes of concentrated thought. Another tool in your arsenal is through using lots of visual aids. Let's see how they work.

CHECK THIS OUT! *Our Attention Span is less than that of a ... uh...O Look!*



CHECK THIS OUT! *Do's and Don'ts in making presentation more effective*

