



Hi graduate friends,

Remember the times you find yourself focused, engaged, and absorbed in what you're doing? I want to talk about how you can try to create more of those optimum learning experiences.

If you want to learn something, you need to practice/study/work on it. But it's not as beneficial if what you do is random and unplanned. It's best if it's *deliberate practice*, that is when you're trying to reach a realistic but challenging goal (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Romer, 2003). What does that mean?

Well, it means you have to have a particular purpose or goal in mind, but your goal needs to have the right amount of difficulty. If it's too difficult, you'll feel hopeless or exhausted, and you won't be able to keep it up. And if it's too easy, your brain won't be working hard enough to learn and stay engaged. This amount of difficulty is also called a *desirable difficulty* (Bjork, 1994).

Now back to the times when you felt like you were able to concentrate, get some work done, and maybe even enjoy it... This happens when you're in a state of consciousness called *flow* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1991). One important thing that helps put you in a flow is working on tasks with desirable difficulties.

Desirable difficulties will be different based on the task and your particular situation. For example, if you're trying to revisit a topic you just learned, instead of revisiting it the same night, try revisiting it 1 or 2 days later when your brain needs to work a bit harder to remember it (Dobson, 2011). If you have a long list of repetitive readings, try taking notes on the text's differences or consider creating a table which compares the different authors/theorists or texts that you are reading. Or if you feel stuck and have not been able to work for weeks/months, open a book chapter and just read one paragraph.

Whatever you are doing, ask yourself, does it have the right amount of difficulty?

Best,



Najmeh Keyhani (she/her/hers), PhD, from your [Learning Development & Success](#) team!

Reference:

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