



By Joe Byerly

I recently finished [\*Ultralearning: Master Hard Skills, Outsmart the Competition, and Accelerate Your Career\*](#) by Scott H. Young. This is an interesting read and in many respects can serve as the self-development bible for those addicted to learning.

Scott has taken on self-directed challenges that include finishing an undergrad MIT curriculum in a year, avoided speaking English for a year (learning and only speaking Spanish, Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, and Korean), and becoming a portrait artist in 30 days.

Check out my ultraquick interview with Scott and make sure you check out his [website](#) too!

**How do you define ultralearning and can you name a few famous people who you**

## **consider ultralearners?**

In the book, I define ultralearning as aggressive, self-directed learning. Meaning people who take on their own projects to learn something, and pursue it doggedly and seriously (as opposed to dabbling). There are a number of people I felt epitomized the practice of ultralearning in my book, but many famous people have applied some of the approach in one way or another throughout their lives: Vincent Van Gogh, Richard Feynman, Benjamin Franklin and many others can all have said to have done some ultralearning efforts at some point, albeit in different ways.

## **How important is feedback in learning a new skill? Are there circumstances where feedback isn't helpful?**

In general, I would say that feedback is helpful. Without any feedback, it's hard to learn anything at all. That being said, there are a lot of special cases where feedback isn't as helpful. Feedback can be misinterpreted, as when people try to get specific advice but from a source that can only offer a holistic evaluation. It can also have emotional consequences, as we all know, so while it is definitely useful, it has to be processed in a way that you won't get discouraged or complacent.

## **Why is asking questions a key component of learning?**

Often when we're reading or listening to something, what we're given are statements—things to learn, concepts, methods, ideas. When we just try to remember this information we're not really engaging with it in a meaningful way. In contrast, when you ask questions you have to piece things together for yourself. This leads to better understanding, but also to a greater appreciation of what you don't understand.

## **Many military leaders rely on intuition in decision-making. How can we improve**

## intuition?

Intuition is often built off of experience coming from having seen many similar situations in the past. The danger of intuition is when one's experience is limited or misleading.

Increasing not only the total volume of experience, but a greater breadth and variety makes our intuition more robust. If you've only been trained in a very narrow set of circumstances, your intuition may collapse when the assumptions that underlie that experience disappear.

## Can we apply the principles to ultralearning in our organizations to encourage self-development?

The key to ultralearning would be to encourage individuals to pursue projects of their own creation/interest/exploration. Such projects have clearly worked in organizations such as Google, which has benefitted from employees taking self-directed projects that have led to many of their more popular applications. However, how much flexibility and independence you want to encourage likely also depends on the goals for your organization.

**[Ultralearning](#) is example of the type of books I feature each month on [my monthly reading list email](#). Sign up today!**

*Scott Young is a writer who undertakes interesting self-education projects, such as attempting to learn MIT's four-year computer science curriculum in twelve months and learning four languages in one year. He lives in Vancouver Canada. Check out [Ultralearning: Master Hard Skills, Outsmart the Competition, and Accelerate Your Career](#)*

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