

Learn it so it actually sticks

A simple study system for busy adults who learn alongside work

If you're capable but frustrated with learning, it's usually not an ability problem. It's a **system problem**: most advice never becomes a process you can rely on when life is busy.

This short guide gives you a clear starting point you can use **this week**.

What this guide covers

- Why material often doesn't "stick" (and what works instead)
- How to switch from rereading to **active recall** (practically)
- A simple **retention loop** you can repeat every week
- How to make it work alongside work, studies, and everyday life

No overwhelm. Just a clear system you can start today.

The core idea: retention comes from retrieval

Rereading feels productive because the text becomes familiar. But familiarity is not the same as memory.

If you want the knowledge to stay, you need to practice **bringing it back from memory**. That's active recall.

Your weekly retention loop (use this for any subject)

Step 1 — Choose ONE focus for the week (10 minutes)

Pick one topic/module you want to truly learn this week.

Write it here:

- This week I will learn: _____
- Why I need this (real reason): _____

Step 2 — Build a “one-page map” (20–30 minutes)

Before you memorize details, create structure.

Do one of these:

- a simple outline (5–10 bullets), or
- a mind map with the main concepts.

Goal: you can see the whole topic at a glance.

Step 3 — Do your first recall session (10–15 minutes)

After your first study session, close the material and answer:

- What were the 3–5 key points?
- What would I explain to someone else in simple words?

Then reopen your notes and correct what you missed.

Step 4 — Add spacing (2 short reviews)

Schedule two quick reviews.

Example:

- Review #1: next day (5–10 minutes)
- Review #2: 3–4 days later (10–15 minutes)

During reviews, do **questions first**, notes second.

Step 5 — Use “micro-tests” (the fastest way to learn)

Create 5–10 questions from your material.

Not perfect questions—just useful ones.

Examples:

- “Explain X in 3 sentences.”
- “What are the 5 steps of Y?”
- “What is the difference between A and B?”

Step 6 — Lock it in with application (2 minutes)

After each session, ask:

- Where does this show up in real life / work / practice?
- How would I use or explain this?

Application makes memory durable.

The simplest daily version (for busy weeks)

If you're overloaded, do the minimum effective dose:

- **20–30 minutes** study
- **5 minutes** recall (close notes, write/say what you remember)
- **2 minutes** plan the next step

Consistency beats perfection.

Quick self-check (end of the week)

Answer in one sentence each:

1. What did I actually retain?
 2. What helped it stick?
 3. What will I change next week?
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Want personalised support?

Some learners find this guide is enough to get unstuck.

Others benefit from building a system around their specific goal, timeline, and constraints.

If you want help designing your learning system, you're welcome to book a **free 30-minute call**.

Book your free 30-minute call here: _____

About Andrea Szabó (short)

Andrea Szabó is a physician and learning coach who helps adults and university students learn faster, remember longer, and perform with more confidence—by building a realistic study system that works in real life.