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Book Review: *How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching*

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While definitely not a “how-to” book, if you teach college, graduate courses, or adult learners in almost any field, *How Learning Works* is a wonderful guide, no matter how long you have been teaching. The information is fresh, pertinent and practical, moving beyond theory that does not always translate to classroom application. Using up-to-date research in learning and instruction, the authors organize their subject matter around seven interrelated learning principles. While it can be read cover to cover, the chapters can just as easily be read in any order according to your interests.

The focus of the text is solidly on students – how their prior knowledge affects their learning, how they organize knowledge, what motivates them, how they develop mastery, what kinds of practice and feedback enhance learning, why course climate matters, and how they become self-directed learners. The authors emphasize learning as a developmental process that involves change “in knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, or attitudes,” and that it is experiential, not something done to students. Each chapter begins with two scenarios culled from classroom experience that illustrate the principle addressed, and ends with strategies for applying the principle, thus demonstrating an evidence-based approach to teaching by synthesizing research and practical advice.

Before I became a Standardized Patient Educator, I taught English composition at the university level for many years. I think I was a pretty good teacher, but I would have been even better had I had the benefit of what these authors offer. It has already impacted the way that I think about training SPs. Once you start reading, fair warning -- you may want to consume the book!

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