

# Become a better lifelong learner in eight steps

By [Jonathan Hawkes](#), issued by [Red & Yellow](#)

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More and more, people are being told to be lifelong learners, but why should you become one (especially if you hated school), and how can you do it effectively?

Lifelong learning is the **process of constantly acquiring more skills, knowledge and experience, even after completing your formal education** at school or university. There are a number of **online and offline learning opportunities to upskill yourself**. You might be an autodidact, someone who is committed to self-learning; take part in on-the-job training; or sign up for free or relatively cheap courses that you complete online (at, for example, [Coursera](#)) or through workshops, like the majority of MBA programmes.

## Who can become a lifelong learner?

Sociologist Benjamin Barber said "I don't divide the world into the weak and the strong, or the successes and the failures... I divide the world into the learners and nonlearners". Hackneyed phrases like "You can't teach an old dog new tricks" might lead you to believe that you are either a learner or a nonlearner. According to psychologist [Carol Dweck](#)(n.d.), however, the key difference is whether you have a fixed or growth mindset.

Having a fixed mindset involves believing that your abilities and traits, which determine success, are inborn and unchangeable. By contrast, people with a growth mindset believe that, through hard work and practice, they can improve their abilities. They love learning, and become resilient to failure and mistakes, as they realise they can always get better. So anyone can become a life-long learner, it just requires the right attitude.

## Why do we need to be lifelong learners?

Technological advances in the ever-changing modern world constantly affect how we work, and we have to constantly learn something new to keep up with this seemingly relentless pace. Gone, for example, are the days computers were just expensive typewriters. Today, people will change jobs, and even careers, several times in their lives ([RecruitGroup](#), 2009). Employers aren't always willing or able to train you up from scratch, so you need to make sure you **acquire the skills, and are flexible enough, to pursue the career path you want**.

Additionally, [a 2013 study](#) indicates that 85% of hiring managers say that most job seekers do not have the skills or traits that employers are looking for. Learning new, relevant skills is a great way to distinguish yourself in the increasingly crowded job market ([Cooper](#), 2014).

There are numerous benefits to becoming a lifelong learner:

- You will be better able to adapt to the ever-changing working world
- You can be promoted and earn more
- You can lead a happier, and more meaningful, fulfilling life ([Laal & Salamati](#), 2011)
- You can be mentally and physically healthier when you are older ([McKay & McKay](#), 2013)

## Common obstacles to becoming a lifelong learner

It might be easy to say that becoming a lifelong learner is the answer to meeting the needs of the ever-changing workplace, and to stave off redundancy or unemployment, but, as is normally the case, it is easier said than done.

## Barriers can include:

- Time - not everyone has the time to study outside of work, and it can be very draining and even frustrating to come home and have to study, which will take time away from other things or relationships you want to spend time on.
- Finances - formal education can be incredibly expensive, and tuition fees, and consequently student debt, are increasingly dramatically.
- Inclination - Lifelong learning requires a lot of self-motivation, and it is not always easy, especially if you are studying alone. Some students struggle to stay motivated during free or low cost courses, and are more inclined to complete courses they pay for ([Larson](#), 2014)
- The completion rate for online courses is very low - [One study](#) found that less than 7% of students completed massive open online courses (MOOCs).
- Not everyone is an autodidact - Some people need the guidance, support and structure offered by instructors, peers and institutions to learn effectively ([Murphy Paul](#), 2014)

## **Becoming an effective lifelong learner**

These barriers might be hard to overcome, but they are not insurmountable. Here are a few tips to help improve your learning:

- If it isn't one already, **make reading a habit** (not just checking the news, Facebook or Twitter), reading something you enjoy for just 15 minutes a day will help you when you want to study something, which generally involves a lot of reading. If you struggle with reading, have a look at this great article about [how to read more](#).
- Write down a **list of the things you would like or need to learn** for your career. Writing down goals is [more likely to help you achieve them](#). In addition to writing your goals down, make yourself accountable to someone, like a friend or family member, by telling them what you aim to do. Better yet, get them to join you.
- Practise guided thinking - Don't read passively; think about what you read, and form your own well-reasoned opinion.
- Practise - You can read about, for example, copywriting to your heart's content, but the information will be useless until you write something, and keep writing, over and over again.
- Teach others - It's no secret that one of the best ways to **hone a skill is to teach it to others**. You can write a blog about something you've learnt recently, help someone at the office, or simply bother your partner or friends and explain it to them. ([Young](#), 2013)
- Schedule just 15 minutes a day for learning, and take advantage of "dead time", whether it's sitting on a bus/train, during a tea break, or waiting for an appointment. You'll find yourself spending more and more time learning.
- Determine your learning style - Figure out whether you are a visual, auditory, musical, verbal, tactile, experiential, or logical learner. Also determine whether you work best alone or in a group, or online or in a brick and mortar institution.
- Become a better reader online - Scrutinise results, and read a number of reputable sources before making up your mind about a topic. Ask friends and colleagues what sites they would recommend. ([Blue Pencil Institute](#), 2014)

We need to be lifelong learners in the 21st century so that we do not get left behind. At [Red & Yellow](#), we focus on providing a conducive, motivating learning environment with a level of personalisation, and strong support channels to accommodate an ever-evolving career.

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