


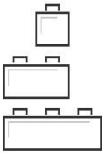



Tackling the Curse of Knowledge

What is the curse of knowledge?

Once you know something it is impossible to imagine what it is like not to know it. Thus we tend to overestimate our audiences prior knowledge and the amount of information they can absorb at any one time.

How can we tackle the curse of knowledge?

| | |
|---|--|
|  | <p>Remember the curse: just being cognisant of the curse of knowledge may go some way toward lessening its impact. When we plan our lessons, reports or meetings the mere recognition that it is highly likely we are overestimating our audiences' knowledge will go a long way to helping us deliver information in a more comprehensible manner.</p> |
|  | <p>Become a novice: empathy is a skill that can be learned. Whenever you can, put yourself in the position of a novice. Be aware of the emotions you feel as you learn new information. Remember how much effort it took you to understand new concepts or ideas. Remember when your teacher was being clear and unclear and how you might replicate the former while negating the latter. Then you are better equipped to come down to the learners' level and help them up the ladder one step at a time.</p> |
|  | <p>Be concrete and avoid abstraction: as we build up our knowledge overtime we begin to think about an idea more and more abstractly. When we use language such as <i>'the subject is not the agent of the verb'</i>, we forget how unrepresentative this language is for describing the world of a novice learner. Whenever possible frame ideas in concrete examples. Use familiar language and ideas to introduce new concepts. Analogy can be one of the most effective tools for attaining this.</p> |
|  | <p>Boil it down and break it up: because we chunk our knowledge overtime we generally overestimate how much information someone can take in one sitting. Knowing this, we must be conscious of overloading learners with too much new information, too quickly. Boil new information down into manageable chunks and deliver it logically and with enough space to apply and reflect on each stage of learning.</p> |
|  | <p>Get some feedback: now that we know we have a cognitive blind spot about how successful our transfer of ideas is, then the logical solution is to get some feedback. Find out if our audience actually understands what we are talking about. See their work as a reflection of your instruction. Build quizzes into every lesson, find ways of polling comprehension of new ideas.</p> |