

# Prior Knowledge

Education

The strongest single predictor of what a learner will take from a lesson.

Prior knowledge is the organised knowledge a learner brings to a task. It determines what they can notice, what they can chunk, and therefore how much working memory the new material will cost.

- Comprehension of a text depends on topic knowledge.
- Experts chunk; novices hold raw elements.
- Reading strategies plateau; knowledge does not.
- Gaps compound: the weak fall further behind.
- Misconceptions are prior knowledge in the way.
- Assess it before teaching, not after.

## LOOK FOR IT

Recht and Leslie, 1988: weak readers who knew baseball outperformed strong readers who did not, on a passage about a baseball game.

Well supported. The practical consequence: curriculum sequence matters more than lesson technique when knowledge is missing.