

Learning About “Handiness”

March 3, 2018 | 4 upvotes | by [resolutions316](#)

Im the classic academic - I work with my brain, I love learning, I love reading and writing, I tend towards clumsiness, lack of spatial reasoning, forgetfulness, etc.

So I've gotten through life with barely any exposure to the mechanical world. I married a very handy woman, but I myself can't fix anything in the house and really don't understand how things work.

Having just finished *Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, I'd love to start addressing this lack of knowledge. I'm curious to learn more about machines, general handiness, and so on.

Any suggestions? Approaches, books, YouTube channels, general concepts, projects? How did you learn your way around fixing things/understanding the mechanical world?

Cheers.

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Comments

[deleted] • 10 points • 3 March, 2018 04:33 PM

By fixing them. Like literally...that's how people learn 99% of the time. Youtube usually has a video. For cars, search forums for the make of your car and problem...it's very likely in there with pictures and a timetable of how long it should take.

Also know your limits. I'm not spending 8 hours and possibly fucking up my engine fixing that timing belt. That one I'm taking in.

ImSteveMcQueen • 1 point • 3 March, 2018 08:12 PM

Timing belt replacement is a 2 hour operation. The only way to screw it up is if you don't align the crankshaft and camshaft timing marks. The Haynes manuals make it obvious how to do this. Stealerships usually want a fortune to change a timing belt. Easy money doing it yourself and you gain confidence. Once you've done one, they are all essentially the same.

The worst part about doing home mechanics is you get grease worked into your hands and fingernails and then she doesn't want them near her. Solution: wear gloves.

gettingmymojoback • 1 point • 3 March, 2018 11:48 PM

Good mechanic/work gloves are worth it just to prevent all those inevitable bloody knuckles.

Edit: just don't wear them around spinning things (ie drill press) if you like keeping your fingers.

donedreadpirate • 1 point • 5 March, 2018 02:57 PM

I like getting the bloody knuckles.

UEMcGill • 1 point • 7 March, 2018 01:17 PM

LPT: change the waterpump while your at it. Way easier and a good preventive maintenance step.

bogeyd6 • 1 point • 5 March, 2018 08:43 PM

Youtube has a plethora of videos on fixing parts of your car and even diagnosing the most common problems.

[deleted] • 1 point • 5 March, 2018 09:59 PM

I agree.

markpf73 • 8 points • 3 March, 2018 05:09 PM

You're an academic. So let's apply the same logic that you apply in the lab, engineering project, or god I hope not operating room.

Start with asking why!

Simple - why won't the drawer on the dresser close.

Then ask how!

How does a normally functioning drawer close? You will figure out that there are multiple designs to a drawer - both in function and it's construction.

Then ask what!

What is preventing the normal function of my drawer?

Oh a sock has fallen behind it and prevents it from closing all the way.

Then ask how!

How do I make it close? Should I just push harder on the drawer and inadvertently blow the back off the dresser? Or should I figure out how to remove the sock and get the drawer to close properly.

This logic flow has taken me from hanging pictures to being able to build a house from scratch. Obviously you will need to add research and knowledge into more complex problems with handiness.

lololasaurus • 5 points • 4 March, 2018 08:25 PM

Any time you think you need to throw out a broken thing, try fixing it before you throw it out.

If you fail, no big deal, you learned something and still buy another.

If you succeed, good job. You learned something and saved money.

FoxShitNasty83 • 3 points • 3 March, 2018 04:28 PM*

Start by looking for things to fix round the house, leaking tap, doors that don't shut properly, walls to paint (I was a painter decorator so hit me up if you need tips). Start small and google / utube the fuck out of it. I recently did the seal around the bath and picked up some great tips.

Depending on the age of your car basic stuff like air filters and oil filters can be done as well as spark plugs. Just don't start with brakes ☐

sivarias • 1 point • 6 March, 2018 04:36 PM

I sense you're speaking from experience. I started to do brakes, then I realized I would have to bleed the brake lines. With my mouth. Yah, fuck that.

FoxShitNasty83 • 1 point • 6 March, 2018 04:43 PM

Yeah it's just not something to fuck about with

SteelToeShitKicker • 3 points • 3 March, 2018 04:31 PM*

With a basic knowledge of electronics you can fix a lot of things.

I'll start you off here. Most appliances in the house heat or turn, or do both. When things that turn fail to do so, check the motor capacitors and relays/contactors that control them. If something fails to heat, it's either a failure in the element or the relay/contactor that controls them.

That's not entirely true when electronics are involved. If you can eliminate the basics, often replacing capacitors on the board will fix things. Capacitors have a finite life span, many of them are only rated for 2000 hours (not entirely true, it depends on temperature also).

Before working on line powered electronics you really need a one of these.

<https://www.homedepot.com/p/Klein-Tools-Non-Contact-Voltage-Tester-NCVT-1SEN/100661787>

Aside from that, there's instructions on youtube on repairing almost anything. Just do it, you will need tools to do so, get cheap tools at harborfreight. If you use the tool only for it's intended use, you will be fine. (i.e. a screwdriver is not a prybar)

Here's an example from my weekend. The HVAC system has been making this buzzing sound for 5-6 seconds before the fan kicks in. Given the system is over 5 years old, I didn't even bother to troubleshoot first. Replace

fan motor capacitor, 10uf 370v. 10\$. Might have been the relay, was time to replace the cap anyway. Turns out it was the cap, problem solved.

[deleted] • 3 points • 3 March, 2018 05:25 PM

I bought my first home almost 50 years ago. At the time, I couldn't do much without help, if at all. My father was always handy and would give advice. Guess he got tired of it, because he gave me a Home Repair manual from Time-Life for Christmas. It was probably the best gift he ever gave me.

When I had time, I would read through it just to get familiar. As they came up, I took on small easy projects first. Then harder and harder, etc.

Today, when I have something I want to do, like ad extra insulation and sound deadening, and sound proofing, and upgraded stereo and speakers to the new RV, I go to Youtube.

I tend towards clumsiness, lack of spatial reasoning, forgetfulness, etc.

Clumsiness means you have to take more time, more precautions. Always have and use the proper tools and safety gear for EVERYTHING. A lot of plumbers are clumsy too, and they still get paid.

Lack of Spatial.... use a ruler. Measure twice, cut once. OK measure three times...

Forgetful. I can relate to that. Write down what you plan to do. Break it out into steps. Just like any academic expertise, make a plan and follow it. I have a notebook that has my drawings, and my plan details on every project I do.

Start small and plan big.

RuleZeroDAD • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 09:07 AM

YES!

Every married couple in my cohort and part of the country got these and this for housewarming gifts.

[deleted] • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 03:19 PM

You are very thoughtful. Back in the day, I would have appreciated having you for a friend for many years to come.

drty_pr • 3 points • 4 March, 2018 06:51 AM

As everyone is full of useful advice, I'll give you a little off topic piece. Your wife will shittest the fuck out of you when you start trying to learn this shit. Pay her no heed. Do you and she can go fuck herself.

UEMcGill • 2 points • 7 March, 2018 01:23 PM

It never ends. I'm handy as fuck (I've done complete remodels) and besides the usual stuff she'll walk around and say shit like "I'd like us to to this, and this and this..."

Like bitch all you do is paint, what the fuck is this we stuff?

OP never forget your accomplishments are her accomplishments!

drty_pr • 1 point • 7 March, 2018 02:09 PM

OP never forget your accomplishments are her accomplishments!

OP never forget your failures are your failures

resolutions316[S] • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 04:14 PM

Haha - I fully expect this, but neither do I blame her for it. I have in the past caused as much destruction as repair with this kind of thing. If she was a dude I'd expect a ball busting. It's fine - I'm trying to learn. If I was great at it I wouldn't need to!

resolutions316[S] • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 04:14 PM

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JudgeDoom69 • 3 points • 4 March, 2018 04:14 PM

Start small by keeping up with simple home maintenance items. Change your furnace filter, keep up lightbulbs, patch cracks in the drywall, clean out the filter on your washing machine (yes, there's a filter you need to clean). Then graduate to more complicated repairs. Most home and vehicle repairs consist of simply finding the bad component and changing it out. You aren't actually "fixing" anything, per se.

If you call a repair person, ask him if you can watch over his shoulder because you're trying to learn. Most dudes are proud to show off their repair skills and explain what they're doing.

If you need a part for something, search the part number on Ebay and filter by "Buy it Now" and then sort by "Price and Shipping, Lowest First". You'll save tons of money on the identical part. A belt for my dryer was over \$40 at the appliance parts place and was \$7.14 on Ebay.

When you need to buy a tool, this is not the time to be frugal. Only buy top quality tools. Pick a brand like Craftsman or Snap On and stick with it. Good tools will last you a lifetime.

lololasaurus • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 10:06 PM

I wouldn't bother with snap on - good stuff, and yes it'll last, but you pay through the nose. Craftsman I do like too, but modern craftsman isn't what it used to be. Husky is fairly decent quality. Finding tools at garage sales is sometimes advantageous. And as a guy who enjoys restoring very old tools, anything with good old steel, especially Swedish or euro steel, or American steel, or Japanese tools, are always a good find. But this is harder to identify if you don't know what you're doing.

Just the perspective of a guy who grew up on a farm fixing everything and still does most of his own work including transmission/engine rebuilds when needed

BetaInBag_BagInRiver • 3 points • 5 March, 2018 01:15 AM

Several people already mentioned looking it up on the internet. I totally agree with this. I was raised and taught by a mechanic, and used to know and be able to do a lot of mechanical, electrical, fabrication type stuff. I've switched fields and don't remember details I had learned and done. Often I do a quick refresh before I tackle something I haven't done in a while, or even tips for something I've never done.

Not too long ago I didn't look up any tips and struggled removing an axle. Had I simply googled removing axle on a Mazda, I would of had it out in seconds instead of hours, that was all ego, "I don't need no instructions/help!"

With that in mind once you find some advice/instructions, check to make sure there are a few sources saying the same thing before you just run with it.

UEMcGill • 1 point • 7 March, 2018 01:29 PM

I have a Honda, the starter went bad so I'm like "easy enough"

I go to the autoparts store get the new one and put the Honda up on the ramps. I crawl under and for the life

of me I can't find the fucking starter. I grew up turning wrenches on American Iron and nothing is in the right spot.

So I go to YouTube and fuck if the starter isn't on the top front of the engine. Literally took me 5 minutes.

Never be afraid to stand on the shoulders of giants...

BostonBrakeJob • 2 points • 3 March, 2018 04:36 PM

Youtube, Google, and shadowing other "handy dudes" are all great tools. But nothing beats hands on experience. Do you have a specific project you're wanting to do?

resolutions316[S] • 1 point • 3 March, 2018 04:41 PM

Nope. I've essentially "learned" to filter out things that are broken until they are so broken I absolutely need to deal with it.

Part of wanting to get into this stuff is developing some more awareness of things that need to be addressed so I can proactively do so.

BostonBrakeJob • 2 points • 3 March, 2018 08:48 PM

u/markpf73 outlined a great way to troubleshoot and fix. Just pick one thing, apply his thought process, repair/replace, rinse and repeat. While you're fixing shit, you learn a lot of the preventative maintenance stuff you can do to stay ahead of total breakdowns.

[deleted] • 2 points • 4 March, 2018 04:24 AM

Make a list with the brand and model of every appliance in your house. Go download the manufacturer's maintenance manual for each one. There's probably a dozen things you should have done in the last year but didn't.

resolutions316[S] • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 04:57 PM

This is a fantastic idea

Jaszen3 • 2 points • 3 March, 2018 04:51 PM

I had a very similar problem. I did what someone else advised. I learned to fix things as they broke. I started with the dryer, washing machine, oven, dry wall etc.... you can find resources all over the internet.

2ndal • 2 points • 3 March, 2018 06:06 PM

Being "handy" is a classic example of learning through action. You can read all the goddamn books you want about how to fix a leaky faucet or repair a piece of drywall or install a garage door opener, but until you get your hands dirty and make some mistakes, you don't know shit.

gettingmymojoback • 2 points • 3 March, 2018 06:53 PM

Exactly, fucking up is a fantastic teacher. Why is everyone so scared to fuck up?

gettingmymojoback • 2 points • 3 March, 2018 06:51 PM

You are living at a time in history when the sum of all human knowledge is literally in the palm of your hands. If you had this information available in the middle ages you would be worshipped as a god.

Lots of good advice in here already that I won't bother repeating. What I will add is this, from my personal knowledge of academic types the problem usually tends to be overthinking and refusing to act until every single

potential fucking variable has been accounted for. This just leads to analysis paralysis.

When it comes to all but the most technical problems, you are usually better off going for it once you feel you have a good grasp of the concepts and just get in there and go for it. What may not make 100% sense when you are reading about it or watching a video, will likely click for you once you get in there and start figuring it out.

Don't be afraid to take something broken and try to figure it out. What's the worst that can happen? It's already fucking broken.

It's a skill that you get better at as you go. You're ancestors didn't have the benefit of guides to work off of. They just went in there and figured it out.

77mrpB2A • 2 points • 3 March, 2018 09:31 PM

Always make sure you have the right tool for the job. You're making it 10x harder on yourself otherwise.

SteelToeShitKicker • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 01:37 AM

I second this. When making a repair, I generally estimate the cost to have someone repair it for me, and I have no problem spending up to that amount on parts and tools. Now you have the tools for your next project.

RealityTastesGreat • 2 points • 4 March, 2018 01:56 AM

Pilates will do wonders for the clumsiness (poor motor recruitment) and therefore ameliorate the unfamiliarity of mind with body. Your visual spatial will improve. You also practice fixing things

tuesdayrain • 1 points • 4 March, 2018 05:59 AM **[recovered]**

So I've gotten through life with barely any exposure to the mechanical world. I married a very handy woman, but I myself can't fix anything in the house and really don't understand how things work.

That's awesome, you can just let your wife fix everything.

resolutions316[S] • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 04:15 PM

This is what she does. And it is great! It's one of the reasons I married her. But we all have a duty to improve our weak points.

[deleted] • 2 points • 5 March, 2018 02:57 AM

Check out the "How it's Made" series from Discovery Channel. You can torrent the past seasons if it's not available in your country.

Watch those and read between the lines just a little bit and you'll realize that the same machine that makes the pvc pipe you shit down also makes food you eat, toys your kids play with, and parts of the car you drive.

Learning how things are made will give you the background knowledge to help you troubleshoot your specific "handy" issues as they arise. "I'm not sure how to fix this but I've seen something similar" guy is way better off than "I'm not sure how to fix this and I don't even have a clue what I'm looking at" guy.

resolutions316[S] • 1 point • 5 March, 2018 12:49 PM

This was one of my broader questions - how to develop a general sense of "how things work."

From the comments I think the general sense mostly comes lots of experience with specific instances. But the show idea is cool. I also picked up an illustrated books on general types of machines/physical laws and so on that I can flip through.

donedreadpirate • 2 points • 5 March, 2018 02:54 PM

So start with your car and home. Need an oil change? Do it. YouTube. Emergency light on? Go to AutoZone, have them scan it, research the problem and fix it. Replace the water pump yourself. Put a new thermostat in. New spark plugs. New alternator. Change the brakes yourself. Rotate the tires. Install a pocket door in your bathroom. Tile your laundry room. Install new flooring. Buy the tools as you need them for everything you do. Instead of paying someone, invest in the tools and time to learn. Break something? YouTube how to fix it. That's how I did it. My Dad always just taught me to pay other people to do this kind of stuff. I had 0 knowledge. Now I have like every fucking tool needed to do 90% of these jobs. I look forward to jobs I don't have the tools for so I can buy more. It's fun as hell.

2gunsgetsome • 2 points • 5 March, 2018 04:38 PM

www.ifixit.com

They have fantastic step-by-step manuals with pictures. Fix all those cracked screens and dead batteries of all your family's devices.

Even if you don't actually have something to fix, you can click through the procedures and see how things go together. You might not know how the logic board on an iPhone WORKS, but you'll know how it's held in there.

bogeyd6 • 2 points • 5 March, 2018 08:47 PM

How do you learn something? Are you hands on or a reader? I myself am a reader and can learn by just watching or reading the manual. I'm yogi level furniture builder. Also, I used to do industrial construction and have access to lot's of things.

My advice, pick one thing that needs fixed and go learn about that one thing in the way you learn. For instance, you need to fix a broken door knob? Go learn about door knobs and find a replacement that you like. Now get in there and start taking the old one apart and spend a few hours figuring out how to put the new one on. Practice, in handy work, is required because you cannot ever get something right the first time. Also, probably not going to be as cheap as you think.

RedPillCoach • 2 points • 6 March, 2018 06:06 PM

Let me bring in a related question. My son is interested in a career in house flipping and I ran him through some financial scenarios (i.e. 'you buy a damaged house for \$100K cash with different repair issues and nearby similar houses go for \$150K, how do you make money). He realized that easiest way to increase the profit margins was to be able to do handyman repairs himself.

So my question is what "repairs around the house" are most cost beneficial to Do It Yourself?

I put Drywall and painting, sanding, hanging shelves, replacing electrical boxes, replacing and setting the toilet bowl and installing tile and hardwood floors at the top of the DIY list.

Beyond that, what DIY home fixit tasks are the biggest bang for the buck?

Rian_Stone • 1 point • 3 March, 2018 06:54 PM

Pick a project, learn as you go.

In college I wanted to learn electronics, so I build a computer inside of an snes. Soldered all the parts. Hard drive as the cartridge, working buttons.

Now I know how to solder and work with circuit boards.

470_2_700_nm • 1 point • 4 March, 2018 07:41 PM

Let your wife handle the handjobs.

