

Growing your own skills

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Reading your forest

Your role is a forest; this chapter is about walking it. First, learn to read the map from where you stand.

Follow the arrows. Within a tree, arrows run from a prerequisite up to the more advanced skill. The path *is* the prerequisite chain — you can't take a skill before the skills below it, and you don't have to guess the order, because the order is drawn.

Check the roots before entering a tree. Beneath each tree sit its roots — skills the tree depends on but doesn't contain. They're what you need *before* you can meaningfully start. Eyeing the Frameworks tree? Its roots tell you what to bring to the door.

Read levels, not just skills. Each skill is either yes/no or three-level (beginner → confident → expert, each level a prerequisite of the next). "Knowing a skill" always means knowing it *to a level* — so your position on the map is a set of skills, each with a level attached, not a list of checkmarks.

And the single most useful reading habit in the whole method:

If something feels impossibly hard, look down. A skill that won't click almost never means you're not capable — it nearly always means a skill *underneath* it is missing or weaker than you rated it. The frustration you feel up the tree was caused down the tree. Look below, find the gap, fill it, and the impossible thing usually turns merely difficult, then routine.

Where your rank fits into this picture — and how it defines your next big step — is the ranks page in chapter 4; this chapter takes it as read.



Choosing a path

The forest shows every possible path. Yours needs choosing — and five principles do most of the choosing for you.

Clear the roots first. Hold a tree's roots before entering it. Skipping entry requirements is the surest way to get stuck later — the missing foundation doesn't disappear, it waits for you at the worst moment.

Follow the chain. Inside a tree, work bottom-up. The map tells you the order, not just the destination; trust it over the temptation to jump to the shiny skill at the top.

A few skills at a time — three to five. Deep progress on a handful beats shallow progress on a dozen. Levels take a month or more to move; spread across twelve skills, nothing moves visibly, and invisible progress is what kills motivation.

Balance relevant against interesting. Your rank demands some skills; others you simply *want*. A path made only of duty burns out; a path made only of curiosity wanders. A sustainable path has both — and the map happily holds both.

Practice, don't just study. Skills grow through use. Courses and books get you to beginner; only real work carries you further, and *teaching a skill back is what turns confident into expert*. When you pick a focus skill, pick the real task you'll grow it on in the same breath.

That's the loop: choose three to five skills the map says you're ready for, attach real work to each, and let the month do its job. Then read the map again.



Tracking your progress

A map only helps if it stays current. So the real question of this page isn't *whether* to track — it's where your forest should live so that keeping it honest costs you nothing.

Paper works — and charges rent. The method predates any software: a page per role in a notebook, an index card per skill, a wall chart with sticky notes. It all carries the method, and it proves an important point — the forest is an idea, not a tool lock-in. But paper quietly bills you for every month of use: you copy levels forward, keep dates by hand, redraw trees whenever a forest review moves skills around, and none of it is visible to the people helping you grow. What starts as a pleasant ritual becomes clerical work — and clerical work is what tracking systems die of.

Skillforests keeps the forest alive for you. The app is the method with the rent removed:

- **Your forest is live.** When the forest review moves skills between ranks or retires one, your map updates — nothing to redraw, nothing to copy forward.
- **History happens automatically.** Every level change is dated the moment it happens, so the growth trail you'd bring to a review or career conversation is simply *there* — months of undeniable progress, no bookkeeping.
- **It's shared by design.** The same map is what your team lead reads coverage from and your coach plans with. On paper, your progress lives in your notebook; in Skillforests, it lives where reviews, 1:1s, and plans already happen.
- **The rhythm is built in.** The monthly update — what moved, what stalled, what's next — takes minutes when the map, the levels, and the dates are already in front of you.

The two habits from this chapter don't change: update monthly, and let level changes carry their dates. The app just makes the first one short and the second one automatic.

If all you have today is a notebook, start in the notebook — a tracked forest on paper beats an untracked one anywhere. But the best tracking system is the one still being updated in six months, and the surest way to be that system is to do most of the updating for you.



Pitfalls

Five ways people trip on their own forest — all avoidable once named.

1. Trying to learn everything. The forest shows all of it, and ambition says *take all of it*. Resist. Focus is the discipline: three to five skills, moved deeply, beat a dozen touched shallowly — every time, without exception. The forest isn't a to-do list; it's a menu.

2. Skipping roots and prerequisites. The advanced skill glitters; the foundations look like homework. But missing foundations don't vanish — they become walls, and you hit them later with momentum. If chapter 7 had a single law, it's this: the fastest path runs *through* the prerequisites, never around them.

3. Reading instead of doing. Reading about swimming won't make you a swimmer. Courses, books, and videos are honest ways to reach beginner — and quietly useless beyond it. If your plan for a skill contains no real task, it isn't a plan for growing the skill; it's a plan for feeling informed about it.

4. Comparing yourself to others. Everyone's forest starts somewhere different — different roots, different history, different luck. Their map is not your map; the only comparison the method endorses is you-now against you-last-quarter. (The dates in your tracker exist precisely to win that comparison.)

5. Giving up too early. A level takes a month to three of real work to move — *by design*. Three weeks in with nothing to show is not failure; it's the middle. The forest was cut so that patience is always rewarded on roughly a monthly rhythm. Trust the cut.

Most of these share one cure: read your own map honestly, monthly, and let it — not mood — decide what's next.

