

## 4 HELPFUL MEMORY TECHNIQUES

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Once information is stored in memory, it is not forgotten. Sometimes, you have difficulty recalling a piece of the information from your memory. The key to effective memory is to realize that short of injury, disease or death, your brain does not lose anything. Effective memory means the ability to produce the right information at the right time. Here are some helpful *Memory Techniques* to get you started.

### 1. **BE ORGANIZED**

- (a) *Learn from the general to the specific.* Get a broad overview of a subject before you begin to learn the details. Skim your entire textbook at the beginning of the term.
- (b) *Make it meaningful.* Relate what you learn to the goals you have set for yourself and to what you want to get from your education. You will learn more effectively when it has meaning in your life. Also, relate new material to what you have previously learned.
- (c) *Create associations.* Your memory is already arranged according to a scheme that makes sense to you. When new data is introduced, you will be able to recall it more effectively if it is stored near similar or related data.

### 2. **BE PHYSICAL**

- (a) *Learn it once, actively.* Learning consumes energy. The major reason that people “forget” is that they never really learned in the first place. To be able to recall something from memory, you must first put it into memory. Reciting material studied is an effective way of putting it into memory.
- (b) *Visualize relationships.* This is done by creating pictures about things you want to learn. Draw diagrams. Use mental visualizations to connect a series of facts. Visual information and verbal information are associated with different parts of the brain. When you make up a picture to go with a concept or a fact, you are anchoring the information in two separate parts of the brain, thus doubling your chances of being able to recall it.
- (c) *Recite and repeat.* Of all memory techniques, recitation works the best for most people. When you want to remember something, repeat it aloud. The aloud part is important. When you repeat something aloud, you anchor the concept in two different senses. First, you get the physical sensation when voicing the concept. Second, you hear the concept. When you review information only in your head, you are in danger of overlooking gaps in your recall.

### 3. **BE CLEAR**

- (a) *Reduce interference.* You may want to turn off the stereo when you study. Find a quiet place that is free from distraction. Allow yourself time to tune into a subject. The most efficient learning begins 15 to 20 minutes after you begin studying. Your brain needs to warm up, so plan accordingly. Take a break, because for most people

the brain needs to rest every 40 or 50 minutes. If you don't take a break, your ability to recall will suffer. After studying an especially difficult subject, do something enjoyable that requires little mental energy, for example take in a movie or go for a walk.

- (b) *Over-learn.* One way to fight mental fuzziness is to learn more about a subject than you have to. Students often stop studying when they know the material well enough to pass a test. A master student will pick a subject apart, examine it, add to it and go over it until it becomes second nature. One effect of over-learning is that over-learned material acts as a magnet for other material; in this way, knowledge begins to grow.
- (c) *Be aware of attitudes.* Your attitude about a subject can affect your ability to recall it. If you have the attitude that history is boring, you may find it quite difficult to recall history. If you have an attitude that math is difficult, you will probably have trouble remembering math. Students tend to forget information that contradicts their opinions.

#### 4. **BE SMART.**

- (a) *Distribute learning.* Marathon study sessions are not effective. You can get far more done in three 2-hour sessions than in one 6-hour session. Two-hour sessions work even better if they are divided into shorter sessions of 40 to 50 minutes. Take regular breaks. Use breaks as mini-rewards. You can actually get more done if you give your brain a break every hour or so. The exception to this rule is when you are deep in the creation of a term paper, or engrossed in programming a computer. During these times, truly significant learning can take place. If you're on a roll, go with it.
5. *Remember something else.* When you are stuck and can't remember something that you know you know, remember something else that is related. If you can't remember your great aunt's name, remember your great uncle's name. If your memory is blocked during an exam, recall facts that are related to the one with which you are having trouble. Similar information is stored in the same area of the brain. You can unblock your recall by stimulating that area of your memory.
  6. *Combine memory techniques.* All of these memory techniques work and all of them work even better in combination with other techniques. Choose two or three techniques to use on a particular assignment. Experiment for yourself.

**GOOD LUCK!**

Ellis, David B. (1985). Becoming a Master Student. (p. 76-82).