

Memory Resource Guide

“I have discovered that it is of some use when you lie in bed at night and gaze into the darkness to repeat in your mind the things you have been studying. Not only does it help the understanding, but also the memory.”

Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519)

The ability to memorize and recall facts and concepts is extremely useful for students and professionals alike. A strong memory is symbol of strength and respect in many careers and cultures. A strong memory is the result of repetition, learned behaviours and a healthy body.

Memory Strategies:

- **Repertoire:** Most people have a few preferred memory strategies. Expand the number of strategies that you use to include the mnemonics described in this handout and succeed under varied conditions.
- **Organization:** Identify themes, hierarchies and relationships between pieces of information. These organizational structures help to reduce the number of individual pieces of information that you will have to commit to memory. Like digital information, many types of information can be compressed into smaller packages or reduced to base tenets from which conclusions can be logically derived.
- **Recall:** Go beyond studying by reading. Use the additional step of recalling information for practice. Many people can recall a fact when exposed to very specific cues. Therefore, broadening the number of cues is another strategy to improve recall.
- **Involved:** Many people falsely believe in learning ‘through osmosis’ such as by memorizing facts by listening to them in their sleep. As Leonardo described, being involved and actively thinking about the information will increase understanding which is the precursor to retention. Dialogue and group interaction are social and effective ways to improve understanding and retention.
- **Selection:** When faced with large amounts of information, be selective in the information that you commit to memory. Overwhelming amounts of trivial details interfere with the memorization of important details.

Memory techniques:

Mnemonics are techniques that are used to improve memorization and recall. Many mnemonic techniques are thousands of years old; most people use at least one mnemonic technique and are not even aware of it.

- **Stable mental environment:** Each person possesses numerous memories that are extremely stable and can be recalled with relative ease. These stable memories can be used to improve recall of other information that is less stable. Often times these stable memories are unrelated to the information that needs to be memorized, but provide a stimulus that dramatically improves recall. Think about the things that you will not forget: your name, swear words, the name of your dog, or a time that you injured yourself.
- **Acronyms:** Acronyms are powerful memory aids that most students have already been exposed to. The first letter of each word is put together to form a new word that stimulates recall of each of the component words. (eg. **ROYGBIV**: Red Orange Yellow Green Blue Indigo Violet – helps to recall colours in the order that they occur in the electromagnetic spectrum)
- **Rhythms:** Utilize cadence or rhyming words to improve recall. For example, 'Left over right, right over left.' describes the tying of a Reef Knot.
- **Acrostics:** Acrostics are sentences that are created from the first letter of a set of words in similar manner to the way words are formed for acronyms. (eg. **Every Good Boy Does Fine** – helps to recall the notes and order they occur on the musical staff)

Memory Interrupters:

- **Attitude** is one of the primary memory interrupters. You must believe the information is important enough to remember and that you have the ability to remember it.
- **Interfering stimuli** destroy memories or prevent them from being formed:
 - Alcohol and drugs
 - Lack of sleep
 - Electronic media (eg. TV, video games)
 - Caffeine
 - Panic
- Similarly, certain **habits and situations** interfere by reducing concentration and preventing the initial learning of the information:
 - Hunger
 - Emotional stress
 - Electronic media (eg. TV, video games)
 - Lack of sleep
 - Self-defeating attitude

Other Resources

- Ellis, D. (1990). *Becoming a Master Student* (7th Ed.). Houghton Mifflin Company. (Chapter 13).