

Specific Strategies for Improving Memory

"Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things." - Cicero



Intend to remember. We remember those things that we are motivated to remember, whether we are naturally interested or have enthusiasm in learning the subject matter. *Intending to remember* is, perhaps, the most vital learning task.

Study first the items you want to remember longest.

Be sure you understand the material. Can you explain the concept to someone else? The more you understand a topic, the better you will remember the details associated with it. A poorly understood concept is difficult to remember because it has little meaning.

Organize the material so that you can file it in its proper place in your memory. If you have organized carefully, remembering part of something will enable you to remember the rest.

Connect new material to prior knowledge. As new learning occurs with your later courses, this material will provide additional background with which to associate future learning. The more you learn, the easier it is to learn more because you have a broader base for anchoring new information.

Use concrete imagery whenever possible. Close your eyes and get a picture of the explanation and summary answer. Try to see it on the page. See the key words underlined.

Use all of your senses. Sight and hearing are the most important senses in acquiring information. Visual learners should take copious notes (and rewrite them). Auditory learners should spend more time reciting orally. For all learning styles, mental recitation is important in transferring material from short-term memory.

Immediately review your notes after class lectures, even if only for a few minutes. This reinforces learning and remembering of material. The greatest amount of forgetting occurs directly after finishing the learning task (many psychologists say information is lost within 20 minutes).

Divide and group your material if there is a basis for doing so. The brain easily remembers things in groups of 5 (plus or minus two items). "Chunk" items together. If you have a list of 15 items to remember, chunk them into 3 groups of 5 and learn the chunks.

Use short study periods rather than cramming. As a general rule, short study periods interspersed with rest intervals are preferred over cram sessions (study 50 minutes, break for 10 minutes).

Selectively choose memory tasks. Select the important topics, facts, and ideas and disregard the least essential elements. When studying, first skim the chapter outline to identify key concepts.

Make and use flash cards.

Use mnemonic devices when other strategies do not work. Rhymes, sayings, and acronyms are examples of mnemonic devices. Mnemonic devices should be used only until you know the material so well that you no longer need them. For example, to remember the five Great Lakes, use the acronym HOMES (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior).

Study before going to bed unless you are physically or mentally overtired.

Adapted from North Carolina State University: http://www2.ncsu.edu/for_students/success/memory_skills.html and the University of Alabama: <http://wwwctl.ua.edu/CTLStudyAids/StudySkillsFlyers/MemorySkills/memoryskills.htm>

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