

# Memory Aids

## Three Key Learning Principles

What good is learning if you don't remember what you learn? There are ways to make learning easier, faster, and more lasting. Here are three important principles.

### *1. Motivation*

When it comes to learning, motivation is everything. It is in **your** interest to make yourself interested in all learning assignments. Being bored doesn't punish your teacher or the author of your materials you are supposed to learn. You would be **punishing yourself**. You will find that with most any subject matter, the more you motivate yourself to delve into it, the more interesting it becomes for you! In addition, the more motivated you are to learn, the greater the chance that your grades will improve!

### *2. Intense Focus*

With any subject matter, you learn easier, faster, and better if you become totally immersed as well as motivated. When immersed in your subject matter, you quickly lose yourself in the learning material. Being immersed in your subject allows you to shut out distractions that otherwise might disrupt the encoding of the information and cementing it into memory. As scientists have demonstrated in multiple experiments, multi-tasking is the **arch enemy of learning!**

### *3. Deliberate Practice*

We all know that repeating learned information helps us to remember it. However, rote memorization, where you repeat something repeatedly without thinking about it, is the worst of all memorizing tactics. Rote memorization takes too long to create or encode what you are trying to learn, so that with this method you may soon forget

Study takes time, but **effective** study takes much less time if you will "study smart." To "study smart," you need to practice recalling information in a deliberate way. To study smart, think about the strategies and tactics you need to be using to master a learning challenge. Be aware of any need to change strategies and tactics that are not working well for you. Don't just "look over" the information. Quiz yourself in ways that force memory retrieval. Ask yourself questions and answer them. Think about the information in different ways and in other contexts. Think about how the information relates to what you thought you **already** knew and what is new about it that you need to incorporate into your knowledge arsenal. Thinking about information in these different ways is a far more efficient and effective method for learning than is rote memory.

The best memory technique is to **think about** what you are trying to memorize. When you are learning, ask yourself questions and then try to generate your own answers. For example, ask questions about the information like:

- What has special meaning for me?
- What is missing that would be useful to know?
- What do I not understand?
- Where can I get this explained better?
- How can I apply this information to what I already know, to other parts of the course, to other courses, and to different kinds of problems?
- What new ideas does this give me?

The reasoning processes required for answering questions like these are excellent tools for highly-effective memory rehearsal.

## Seven Common Memorization Techniques

The most basic feature of effective memory enhancing techniques (mnemonics) is the association of what you are learning (the new) with what you already know (the old). Unfortunately, this association process does not always occur automatically. That is why it helps to know and use specific tactics designed to promote the creation of these associations.

Below we explain seven mnemonics that you can use to promote effective memorization. We will walk you through how you can use these techniques right now to help you remember the content in this current instructional module.

### *Seven Memorization Techniques*

<p><b>Common-Sense Thinking:</b> Every new bit of information has meaning. Thinking about that meaning improves your understanding and may give you new ideas. In the process, you are also memorizing.</p> <p><b>Acronym:</b> Use the first letter of each word to create one set of letters, forming an acronym. Ex: U.S.A. for United States of America.</p> <p><b>Acrostic:</b> Use the first letter of each word of a concept or item you are trying to remember to create a string of words. Ex: <u>A</u>ll <u>C</u>ows <u>E</u>at <u>G</u>rass (the white keys on a piano)</p> <p><b>Categorization:</b> Group similar items together. Remembering any item in a category often will help you recall the others in that same category.</p>	<p><b>Subject-Object-Verb (SOV):</b> Imagine a picture of someone or something doing something to a target or object.</p> <p><b>Memory Palace:</b> Visualize (create a mental picture for) each item you want to remember and mentally place that item's image on or in a place with which you are familiar (like objects in your room, parts of your bicycle, etc.)</p> <p><b>Story Chain:</b> Imagine a picture for each item you want to remember and mentally place it into a story that you make up.</p>
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As you begin to review these techniques, it is useful to know that while each of these seven techniques can be applied using words or language, the most effective approach is often to convert words into mental images. Once you create your own mental images, memorization of the concepts you are trying to learn (remember) becomes easier and more reliable—even fun! We

have summarized these seven techniques in the table below and described how each works. Once you have reviewed these techniques, we will guide you step-by-step through ways you can apply them to this instructional module.

We know that some of these tactics may seem dumb or a little silly, but often the dumber and sillier they are, the more powerfully they promote memorization. Memory Palace and Story Chain techniques are in fact the most powerful of the seven memorization techniques. Successful “memory athletes” use them to compete in international contests designed to see who can memorize the most in the shortest amount of time. With Memory Palace, for example, contest winners have been able to memorize the sequence of four shuffled decks of cards in less than three minutes! Without these techniques or tactics, their memorization ability would be no better than your own.

Two other advantages of these memory aid techniques are not so obvious. One advantage is that these techniques exercise and develop your creativity. You must imagine mental pictures that work for you. Secondly, you must think about the item being memorized in order to construct the memory aid and we already know that thinking is great memory rehearsal.

Below, we will provide ideas for ways you can use one of these seven mnemonic techniques for each memory task in this learning module. For each given memory task, choose the technique that seems to work best for you and that best fits the task. You don’t have to use the words or sample images we use here. These are simply examples. Make up your own scheme based on what is easiest for you to remember and what works best for you.

Once you construct a mnemonic for a given learning task, force yourself to recall it three or four times the first day. Repeat that recall once a day for the next four or five days. Remember: forced recall is essential to effective memorization. And, recall is most powerful if you say it aloud, write it down, or draw it.

**Source:** the eBook, *Better Grades, Less Effort*