

General Guidelines to Improve Memory

In addition to exercising your brain, there are some basic things you can do to improve your ability to retain and retrieve memories:

- 1. Pay attention.** You can't remember something if you never learned it, and you can't learn something — that is, encode it into your brain — if you don't pay enough attention to it. It takes about eight seconds of intent focus to process a piece of information through your hippocampus and into the appropriate memory center. So, no multitasking when you need to concentrate! If you distract easily, try to receive information in a quiet place where you won't be interrupted.
- 2. Tailor information acquisition to your learning style and use as many senses as possible.** Most people are visual learners; they learn best by reading or otherwise seeing what it is they have to know. But some are auditory learners who learn better by listening. They might benefit by recording information they need and listening to it until they remember it. Even if you're a visual learner, read out loud what you want to remember. If you can recite it rhythmically, even better. Try to relate information to colors, textures, smells and tastes. The physical act of rewriting information can help imprint it onto your brain.
- 3. Relate information to what you already know.** Connect new data to information you already remember, whether it's new material that builds on previous knowledge, or something as simple as an address of someone who lives on a street where you already know someone.
- 4. Organize information.** Write things down in address books and datebooks and on calendars; take notes on more complex material and reorganize the notes into categories later. Use both words and pictures in learning information.
- 5. Understand and be able to interpret complex material.** For more complex material, focus on understanding basic ideas rather than memorizing isolated details. Be able to explain it to someone else in your own words.
- 6. Rehearse information frequently and “over-learn”.** Review what you've learned the same day you learn it, and at intervals thereafter. What researchers call “spaced rehearsal” is more effective than “cramming.” If you're able to “over-learn” information so that recalling it becomes second nature, so much the better.
- 7. Be motivated and keep a positive attitude.** Tell yourself that you *want* to learn what you need to remember, and that you *can* learn and remember it. Telling yourself you have a bad memory actually hampers the ability of your brain to remember, while positive mental feedback sets up an expectation of success.

Mnemonic Devices to Improve Memory

The three fundamental principles underlying the use of mnemonics are imagination, association and location. Working together, you can use these principles to generate powerful mnemonic systems.

Imagination: is what you use to create and strengthen the associations needed to create effective mnemonics. Your imagination is what you use to create mnemonics that are potent for you. The more strongly you imagine and visualize a situation, the more effectively it will stick in your mind for later recall. The imagery you use in your mnemonics can be as violent, vivid, or sensual as you like, as long as it helps you to remember.

Association: this is the method by which you link a thing to be remembered to a way of remembering it. You can create associations by:

- Placing things on top of each other
- Crashing things together
- Merging images together
- Wrapping them around each other
- Rotating them around each other or having them dancing together
- Linking them using the same color, smell, shape, or feeling

As an example, you might link the number 1 with a goldfish by visualizing a 1-shaped spear being used to spear it.

Location: gives you two things –

First, a coherent context into which you can place information so that it hangs together.

Second, a way of separating one mnemonic from another. By setting one mnemonic in a particular town, I can separate it from a similar mnemonic set in a city. For example, by setting one in Wimbledon and another similar mnemonic with images of Manhattan, we can separate them with no danger of confusion. You can build the flavors and atmosphere of these places into your mnemonics to strengthen the feeling of location.

Common types of mnemonic devices include:

1. **Visual images.**
2. **Sentences** in which the first letter of each word is part of or represents the initial of what you want to remember.
3. **Acronyms**, which are initials that creates pronounceable words.
4. **Rhymes and alliteration:**
5. **Jokes** or even off-color associations using facts, figures, and names you need to recall, because funny or peculiar things are easier to remember than mundane images.
6. **“Chunking” information;** arranging a long list in smaller units or categories that are easier to remember.
7. **“Method of loci”:** You associate each part of what you have to remember with a landmark in a route you know well, such as your commute to work.