

## 20 General Memory Tips

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As students, we often find that memorizing information is the cornerstone to success. Whether committing to memory information for quizzes, tests or just general information to be used later in our profession, a good memory goes a long way. Sometimes it is easy to become overwhelmed with the amount of information that we must commit to memory. The truth is that we can memorize just about anything that we choose if we employ some simple tips to aid in the process. Remember the acronym RARE--Relax, Attend, Rehearse, Envision to help you remember. These four components can maximize memory performance. It is essential to relax so that you can attend to the material to commit to your memory. Rehearsing the material partially through visualizing the specific components to be memorized aids in enhancing this process. This serves as a comprehensive method to aid in general memory improvement.

1. Self Fulfilling Prophecy--If you view yourself as having a poor memory you will. It will become a self fulfilling prophecy. Tell yourself that you have a good memory and that it is improving everyday. If we believe we can--then we can! Praise yourself for remembering but never punish yourself for forgetfulness. Absentmindedness is a chosen state of mind. It is the result of choosing to focus on only a limited portion of your external environment and to employ poor organizational skills. Approach your daily tasks with enthusiasm. Excitement fuels attention and concentration which are the cornerstones to good memory.

2. Organize--Find a central location to place the things that you use in your daily routine. Your keys, calendar, wallet, and purse can all be placed in a specific area. Find a scent that you like (such as an air freshener or a "Glade Plug In") and place it in that location. Smell enhances your memory. Being organized also enhances your memory and decreases stress. Another example is to place your checkbook, calculator and bills in a central location so that when it comes time to pay bills everything you need for the task is together. Associate and simplify the components of daily routines together. If you have to make a phone call in the morning, place a reminder next to your toothbrush as a reminder. Making lists and recordings of what you want to remember can also be beneficial. Outline what you want to remember and incorporate this into your daily routine.

3. Focus--Pay special attention to information that you wish to commit to memory. Form a mental picture of the grocery items that you need, write it down or use a tape recorder to jog your memory. Take the time necessary to rehearse the information immediately after hearing it in your mind. Repetition makes it easier and reinforces the learned material. Concentrate on the task at hand.

4. Relax--Memory will be better if we take the time needed to store and recall the information. As we age it takes a little more time to store and recall information. Don't panic if you can't immediately recall something. Take your time, relax and allow it to come to you rather than beat yourself up in the process of forcing it. It is important to

allow yourself the time necessary to complete a thought, to express yourself, or to complete a task. When we are rushed for time our memory often fails us. Examine any internal conflicts that may be hampering your memory. Look for patterns in your memory difficulties such as names, places, or events. Memory always works better when we are well rested and not tired. Take control and limit your responsibilities and expectations to a level that is comfortable for you.

5. Limit Distractions--It is much more difficult to access your memory when you are surrounded by contradictory stimuli from your senses. Find a quiet place, limit distractions and allow your memory to work for you.

6. Categorize--Placing information into categories makes it easier to remember. For example, when remembering items to be picked up at the grocery store we can place them in specific categories. Lunch meat and hamburger can be placed into the category of meat. Eggs and milk can be placed into the category of dairy products. Doughnuts and candy can be placed into the category of treats. We now only need to remember three categories rather than six separate items.

7. Chunk It--The opposite of categorization (#6) is chunking. This involves learning small portions of a concept and later putting them together to form the whole. A good example of this is your social security number. Many of us remember three chunks or sets of numbers (e.g. 999-99-9999). It is easier to remember three sets of numbers rather than one nine digit number. If you are trying to remember an article start with the main premise. Then associate related themes back to the main premise. By breaking down the information, we are actually checking the accuracy of the information and thus enhancing our memory. Finally, file this in your mental computer under one specific title.

8. Sense It--By using the different senses to aid in our memory we are physically utilizing different portions of our brain to aid in this task. Your sense of smell is much deeper in the brain than your vision. Visualizing the brightness of an object uses different cells than imagining the color of it. Imagine yourself in the grocery store collecting the items within the three categories defined above. See the items being put into the cart. See the colors, openly verbalize the items, feel the textures and smell the scents associated the food groups. Actively utilize all of your senses to aid in the detail of memory. The more effort put into the imaginary component of the task, the greater will be the fruits of your labor.

9. Attach It--It is easier to remember things if they carry some significant meaning. Try to decide why what you want to remember is important. Perhaps the above grocery items are part of a special dinner that you are preparing for a friend. Attach the food items to the dinner and the emotion associated with that evening.

10. Preparatory Set (Attention Preparation)--Prepare your mind in the same way an athlete prepares prior to engaging in sports. For example, if you have to give a presentation do a mental warm-up before presenting. Rehearse everything that will be involved with making the presentation. Close your eyes and envision what the room will look like; do a mental inventory of all the materials that you will need (e.g. notecards)

and imagine some questions that the crowd may ask you. Mental visualization may not only be empowering, it can help you be prepared and organized.

11. Use Humor--Compose a humorous phrase, song or mental image to assist in remembering. When humor is attached to the item to be remembered it is both entertaining and more easily recalled. This will also serve to help you to relax, stay positive and to become less burdened with stress and tension. Creativity goes a long way toward remembering.

12. Use It or Lose It--Memory is improved through practice. Upon retirement many people find that their recall begins to become rusty. This is in part due to the fact that they are not using their memory to the degree that they once did. Doing crossword puzzles, reading and taking a college course all serve to enhance your memory and aid in your confidence about yourself. Practicing drawing or doodling can also enhance your visual imagery skills. Just simply drawing what ever comes to mind allows you to place a visual representation of what's in your mind on paper. Finally, find a way to teach others. By teaching we are enhancing our own memories.

13. Label Memory Files--By consciously choosing key word connections within your mind in order to place other words, you are saving space in the hard drive of your mind and enhancing access. For example, when we hear a key word such as feminism we associate many thoughts with this word. We may remember key individuals, circumstances or events that fall within this label. We can also link our visualization, auditory memory and other sensory perceptions to this label to aid in memory improvement. Labeling memory files allows us to link one word with whole concepts.

14. Create a Mental Calendar--Utilizing a calendar to guide you through your daily activities creates self reliance and confidence and allows you to plan ahead and free up space in your mind for other important memories. Use one calendar to chronicle appointments, daily events, reminders, responsibilities and goals. Write down anything that is important to you. Keep this calendar accessible in a central location. This calendar becomes an external extension of your memory. Other external extensions of your memory can be beneficial. Leaving yourself notes or an empty milk jug next to the front door can serve to remind you to pick up milk at the grocery store.

15. Mind Body Connection--It is essential that you take proper care of your body if your memory is to function at its fullest potential. Exercise and diet are an essential part of keeping your memory working for you. Exercise relieves stress, enhances blood flow and provides needed nutrients to the brain. Avoidance of alcohol and other drugs will also enhance your memory.

16. Come in Through the Back Door--Everyone experiences blocks to their memory at times. The more you try to recall a piece of data, the further away it seems to get. This becomes more fueled by frustration and negative self-talk. Replace any negative self-talk with positive affirmations. Avoid the frustration by talking around the item to be recalled. Use words that are similar, express yourself in approximations, and keep the thought active. By doing so you will often pull out the item to be remembered. Remember that the human brain contains billions of nerve cells that are intricately

connected to form memories. It is normal that we are sometimes unable to access a single pathway within this complex map of neural cells.

17. Time is on Your Side--Our brain uses the element of time to chunk memories together. When you have difficulty remembering something, try to reconstruct the time frame associated with that memory. By doing so you are tapping into the physical part of the brain where that memory is stored and activating the neural networks associated with that memory. For example, if you want to remember what you got for your birthday last year, reconstruct that time frame in your mind. Picture what you were wearing, how the day began and whom you were with. As you link memories in this manner other associated memories will gradually surface into your awareness. As we age, more and more memories are associated with more time frames. It is therefore natural that our recall may be slow. The payoff is that research has demonstrated that the accuracy of information recalled is positively correlated with age.

18. Associate It--Memory begins with association. Biologically, our conscious awareness accesses our subconscious and unconscious memories through associating new memories with old ones. By knowing this we can use this natural process to our advantage. Information is associated in our brains together rather than in isolation. For example, if you just met someone with a unique name, associate it with similar sounding words that you already know.

19. Creativity and Flexibility--Always ask yourself a simple question... "What is another way I can look at this problem?" Rigid thinking is often a precursor to poor memory. Examine the problem at hand. Turn it over and look at it from all angles. Put it down and do the same later. More memory associations are formed by examining things from different perspectives. Creativity and flexibility also allow us to find more ways to access the information to be recalled.

20. Focus on Your Strengths--Many of us learn better if we first view the whole concept where others do better by first learning the individual parts. Recognize your preference and start there. If you are visually oriented utilize this strength in memory and recall. Incorporate your individual personality style into your memory techniques. For example, a good sense of humor can go a long way in finding something unique about an individual to associate with his/her name. Go beyond your mind's natural limits and plug in a detail that you may not have initially observed until you took the time and effort to do so. Remember that good memory starts with the quality of the information that is taken in through your senses from your environment.