



## Quick Tips: How to Improve Your Memory

Combine these techniques to make a customized memory system that fits your style of learning!

**Organize It: Organized information is easier to find.**

- **Learn from the general to the specific:** Learning & remembering increases if we get “the big picture” before trying to understand all the details. So, in reading a book, skim it for the general idea first. In approaching a class, get an overview by speaking with someone who has already taken it or skimming the textbook. List facts in alphabetical or chronological order.
- **Make it meaningful:** When information helps you get something you want, it’s easier to remember. If your bogged down by or unmotivated in a class, then look for connections between what you want and what you are studying.
- **Create associations:** When you introduce new information, you can recall it more effectively if you store it near similar information. So, relate it to something you already know.

**Use Your Body: Learning is an active process; get all your senses involved.**

- **Learn it once, actively:** Creating energy and action greatly enhances memory. Stand when you study. Pace back and forth as you recite material. Use your hands. Learning is not a passive activity!
- **Relax:** When we’re able to direct our focus and attend to what we want, we absorb new information quicker and recall it with greater accuracy. Relaxation helps us clear our minds and focus our attention.
- **Create pictures:** Visual information is associated with a different part of the brain than verbal information. Creating a picture of it not only stores the information in two parts of your brain, but also helps you connect facts and illustrate relationships. Draw it. Use color. Make the images absurd and memorable. Mind maps can be very helpful.
- **Recite it:** When you repeat something out loud, you anchor the concept in two different senses; the combined result is synergistic! So, read your text out loud, talk to someone about it, flip through your note cards...but out loud!

- **Repeat it:** Repetition is the most common memory device because it works. It is most effective when you put it in your own words, because you are forced to think about it. But you can have fun with it by making it into a song and singing it or imitating someone (Clint Eastwood, Darth Vader) while you recite.
- **Write it down:** Repetitive writing is a powerful technique (remember writing your spelling words or math facts?). Writing engages a different kind of memory and encourages logical, coherent thought processes (and by doing so exposes gaps in our knowledge).

### **Use Your Brain: Work with your memory, not against it.**

- **Reduce interference:** Our brains are less effective when attention is divided between tasks. So, develop a study space that has minimal visual and auditory distractions. Use small, frequent breaks to refocus.
- **Overlearn:** Study materials until it is second nature; this is more than just knowing it well enough to take a test. Do the assignments, then pick it apart, examine it, add to it, etc. The potential rewards are speed, accuracy and greater confidence on the exam.
- **Escape the short-term memory trap:** Short-term memory fades quickly. To shift information to long-term memory (and make it available for you later in the term at exam time!), do short reviews periodically between study sessions, review your notes following class or do frequent mini-reviews daily/weekly.
- **Distribute learning:** Research shows that marathon study sessions are not effective. You can get far more done in three two-hour sessions than in one six-hour session. Practice dividing your study time into chunks with frequent breaks.
- **Keep a positive attitude:** Studies show that if you repeat negative feelings about a subject, you increase your chances to fail! Success is enhanced by replacing negative thoughts with positive, but realistic thoughts. For example, replace “I can’t do it.” With “It’s not easy, but I will accept this challenge and will get closer to my goals.”
- **Choose what not to store in memory:** Just as we choose to avoid certain foods, we can choose not to retain certain kinds of information. Determine what’s essential to remember by extracting the core concepts and abbreviate large passages of information into easy to digest phrases.
- **Combine memory techniques:** All of these memory techniques work even better in combination; the effect is synergistic!

**Recall It: This is easier when you use the other principles to store information.**

- **Remember something else:** When you are stuck and can't remember, think of something related to the information. Remember, related information is stored together. So, you can unblock your recall by stimulating that area of your memory.
- **Notice what you remember:** Memory is related to our learning styles, so we remember different types of information better than others. Take note of what kind of information you recall naturally and easily. Work within that strength.
- **Use it before you lose it:** Even information stored in long-term memory becomes difficult to access if we don't use it regularly. So, simply read it, write it, speak it, listen to it, or apply it. This is especially effective when you have to recall information from a previous course. Keep your notes, texts, etc. so that you can keep the information fresh with a review.

**Adapted from *Becoming a Master Student* by David Ellis, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 1997  
by the Student Development & Counseling Center  
Administration Building, Room 220  
797-5365**