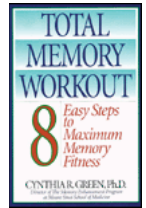




Eight Memory Techniques You Can Really Use

Source: *TOTAL MEMORY WORKOUT: 8 Easy Steps to Maximum Memory Fitness*, by Cynthia R. Green, Ph.D., Founding Director of the Memory Enhancement Program at Mount Sinai School of Medicine



Using a technique to help us learn something we want to remember is another way we can make the most of our memory. You can improve your memory by being attentive to information you need to remember, by identifying and coping effectively with things in your daily life that limit your memory potential, and by practicing good organizational habits.

However, there are circumstances where deploying a good memory technique may be useful. For example, you may need to remember something “by head,” such as a license plate number, a cell phone number, or a PIN number. Or you may find yourself in a situation where you don’t have much control over the information and need to absorb it quickly. This is often the case when you’re getting directions or learning a name.

A good internal memory technique can be an important part of better memory fitness. However, it is not a substitute for it.

Internal memory techniques are very powerful ways to learn and remember information. Let’s look at how they work:

- **They force you to focus attention on what you are trying to learn.** When you apply an internal memory technique, you are forced to concentrate. In fact, just using a technique makes it impossible not to pay attention. And we already know that we absorb something we want to remember more effectively when we attend to it.

- **They give meaning to what you are trying to learn.** Internal memory techniques are successful because they give meaning to something you want to remember. This works in two ways: In many cases, we can find meaning inherent to the information we are trying to learn. Or we can impose meaning on material that doesn’t necessarily have that meaning to make it more memorable. And something that is meaningful is more memorable.

Here are eight methods guaranteed to boost your brainpower:

The Repetition Technique

Here’s a technique so simple you probably do it already and don’t even think about the fact that you’re using a method to help yourself remember. When you need to learn something “by head,” repeat it to yourself. By repeating the information, you are getting yourself to focus attention on it and thus giving yourself more opportunity to learn it. Sometimes that’s all it takes.

The Link Technique

One powerful way we can remember better is by hooking together the information we are trying to learn. Like a series of dominoes knocking one another down in a line, you can remember items by linking them one to another. Take the following list of randomly selected words:

Table
Pen
Locket
Umbrella
Salt



To link this list, I first hook “table” to “pen.” Perhaps I see a pen on a table, or think about a table shaped like a pen. Next, I connect “pen” with “locket.” Maybe I visualize a pen with a locket on a chain wrapped around it or a pen hanging from someone’s neck like a locket. Following that, I hook “locket” to “umbrella.” I could picture another locket shaped like an umbrella, or perhaps an outdoor market cart selling trinkets, with the word “lockets” written in large letters on the umbrella. Finally, I link “umbrella” to “salt,” perhaps by picturing the Morton® Salt container, with the image of the little girl protecting herself from the rain of salt with an umbrella. Now I have linked this list: When I think of “table,” it will remind me of “pen.” “Pen” will trigger my recollection of “locket,” “locket” will lead me to “umbrella,” and “umbrella” will help me recall “salt.” I have successfully used this simple technique to learn and remember this word list.

The link technique is a great way to learn and remember information, especially if that information lends itself to being hooked together. It is one of the simpler and more straightforward techniques, as it doesn’t require a great deal of creative energy or time. It is a particularly powerful when used for lists.

The Storytelling Technique

If you want to remember something, make up a story about it. Storytelling is a wonderful way to make information memorable. It not only connects the information together, but also gives it a narrative meaning. For most of us, a story is an easygoing thing to recall.

Let’s say that you want to memorize the following license plate number:

NM120F

Making up a story involving the information in the license plate number can help you do that. My story for this license plate is: “In New Mexico, it’s 120 degrees Fahrenheit.” Now we’ll be able to use that story to help us remember the license plate more effectively.

Storytelling is also a great general memory technique because it’s very versatile. It’s easy to make up a story about something as simple as a license plate or as complicated as points in a presentation. Let’s say you had to

memorize the ingredients for a favorite chicken dish. You need:

**chicken
chicken broth
wild rice
dried apples
walnuts
salt
pepper**

How can you remember this list? Make up a story. Here’s mine:

A chicken went walking through a wild-rice paddy. The paddy soon smelled like a chicken broth. On the other side it ended up in an apple orchard full of old dried apples. Next it ended up in a walnut grove. It made the farmer so upset his hair turned salt and pepper.

Storytelling is one of the more involved techniques presented here, since it requires some imagination and time to use. However, this is a popular technique since we are all familiar with stories and tend to like them.

The Connection Technique

Another simple way to make something more memorable is to give it meaning by connecting what you are learning to something that you already know. Many people find that they naturally make a connection between newly learned material and something known to them beforehand. Let’s use a number I once had to memorize as an example. When the medical center where I worked changed the phone system, I had to learn the following access code:

7 6 9 0 1 3

In order to remember this number, I came up with the following connection: The first two digits, 76, reminded me of a song from one of my favorite musicals, *Music Man*. Humming “Seventy-six trombones led the big parade ...” I made a connection to the next two numbers, 9 and 0. I park at a garage on 90th Street, so I coupled these numbers to that familiar location. Finally, I found I could remember the next two digits, 1 and 3 by hooking them to my son’s birthday, which falls on the thirteenth of the month. By making a connection between this number and information already known to me, I was able to learn and remember it more effectively.

The Connection Technique allows you to take advantage of information you already have and use it to give meaning to something newly learned, thereby making that information more memorable.

The Rhyme Technique

Many people like to help themselves remember information by making up a rhyme for it. The Rhyme Technique requires a lot of creative energy and a certain talent but many people really like it! They find it fun to make up rhymes-and, let's face it, if something's fun, you're more likely to do it. How does the Rhyme Technique work? Let's take the recipe list from above again, only this time let's try to learn it using this technique:

chicken
chicken broth
wild rice
dried apples
walnuts
salt
pepper

Here's a rhyme to help you remember this list of ingredients:

**Oh, the chicken swam into the broth
The rice brewed wildly
The apples dried on walnut husks
On the salt and pepper sea.**

If you are musically inclined, you may even find you like to give your rhymes a little tune. While it may seem complicated, make sure to try it. Maybe you'll uncover an unknown talent!

First Letter Association Technique

The First Letter Association Technique is another familiar method, where you take the first letter of each word in a list of words you wish to remember and make a word or phrase associating to it. Abbreviations and acronyms are popular examples of first letter association. Take the following examples:

- **What does U.S.A. stand for?** If you said United States of America, you're correct (and you thought these techniques were hard!).

- **What does TGIF mean?** "Thank God It's Friday," a popular refrain.
- **Do you know the names of the five great lakes?** Chances are you do, but it may be a bit hard to think of them. If you remember the first letter association HOMES, however, you'll always be able to think of them: Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior.

Why are first letter associations so popular? Most likely because they are such a powerful way for us to remember things. Let's look at why:

1. **First letter associations get us to focus attention and give meaning to material we are learning.**
2. **First letter associations allow us to remember more by memorizing less.** When we use a first letter association we reduce the material we must memorize. Take the above example of using the word HOMES to help recall the names of the five Great Lakes. When you recall that one word it reminds you of the five names you need.
3. **First letter associations give us clues.** It's always easier to recall information when you have a little help doing so. First letter associations give us the first letter for whatever it is we are trying to remember. That first letter acts as a prompt, or clue, which is a big boost to our memory.
4. **First letter associations let us know when we're done.** When you have a first letter association for a list, you know that if you match an item or word with every letter on that list you're finished. In other words, everything you need to remember is in that first letter association.

Now you can see why the First Letter Association Technique is so useful and so popular. Let's try a first letter association exercise using the list from the link technique exercise:

table
pen
locket
umbrella
salt

To apply the First Letter Association Technique, I take all the first letters of the items on this list:

t p l u s

Next, I see if I can make up a word to help me remember these letters. “T-PLUS” is a rather obvious choice here. Another possible first letter association for this list might be “PLUST.” When I later need to remember this list, I simply need to remember “T-PLUS” to jog my memory for table, pen, locket, umbrella, salt.

There are some drawbacks to the First Letter Association Technique. It requires a bit of creative energy. In addition, these associations can be difficult to create in certain, circumstances, such as when you have a list that has no words beginning with a vowel. While there are ways around such problems, first letter association is not the easiest internal memory technique available. However, it possesses some unique characteristics that make it an effective way to boost your brainpower, especially if you enjoy a challenge.

The Snapshot Technique

Another great way to help yourself remember something is to picture it. We tend to underutilize our visual memory even though it is a powerful way for us to learn and recall information. The Snapshot Technique let’s us take advantage of our visual potential. Simply come up with a visual picture for the information you are trying to remember. No need to get a complicated story line going—just picture what you need to recall, as if you were taking a snapshot of it. Let’s try this technique on the following word list.

**walk
patch
clown
fox
fair**

I can help myself remember this list by picturing each of these items in my mind’s eye. For “walk,” “I could “see” a sidewalk. “Patch” brings up the image of a patch on

a pair of jeans. A clown is easy to picture, as is a fox. Finally, “fair” calls to mind the image of a county fair. By using the Snapshot Technique, I am paying closer attention to the material I am trying to learn. I am also making the information more meaningful by connecting it to a visual image.

The Snapshot Technique is one of the easiest internal memory techniques. Many people find that picturing information they are trying to learn is a simple and quick way of boosting their brain power.

The Movie Technique

We can also use our visual advantage by making up movies, or visual associations, for things we are trying to remember. Think of this method as the storytelling technique with pictures. The Movie Technique works best if the movies:

- **Are vividly “seen.”** The clearer the image for the movie is in your mind’s eye, the more likely you are to remember it.
- **Have motion.** A visual association involving some kind of movement will be easier to recall.
- **Are exaggerated or silly.** Something that is unusual or funny captures our attention and is easier to remember.

Let’s try the Movie Technique using the same word list we used for the Snapshot Technique:

**walk
patch
clown
fox
fair**

Now picture the following: A clown with patched clothes is walking his pet fox through the county fairgrounds. Close your eyes and get a really good picture of this in your mind’s eye. This visual association is vivid, has motion, and is certainly silly. You will now be able to remember this list by “seeing” this funny image.

And there you have it—eight great ways you can remember information “by head.”

© 2008 Cynthia R. Green, Ph.D.

This publication is for general informational purposes only and is not intended to provide any reader with specific authority, advice or recommendations.

Copyright © 2011 LifeCare®, Inc. All rights reserved. LifeCare®, Inc. is the worldwide provider of Life Event Management® Services
#7376_EightMemoryTechniquesYouCanReallyUse_FOH_0808

