

ACADEMIC SKILLS CENTER

STUDY SKILLS LIBRARY

How We Remember

Discussion

Memory itself probably cannot be developed; however, improvement in remembering comes from correcting certain habits or thoughts so that we use our memory to its fullest potential. Remembering is like seeing; improvement in either function does not depend upon how much we use it but, rather, how we use it.

1. The first and most important rule for remembering is: cultivate the habit of close attention to the thing you wish to remember. Be sure you have a clear, sharp impression of the face, name, date, or facts, which you will need to know at a future time. If you wish to remember a fact, make it meaningful to you.
2. When we are learning, we should try not only to get a strong impression but also to obtain as many different kinds of impressions as possible. Some people can remember colors distinctly, but have a poor memory for shapes. But anyone, by putting together and using all of the impressions our sense organs bring us about one thing, allows us to remember it much more clearly than if we were to rely on sight or sound alone. For example, try reading your lesson aloud. In doing this, your eye takes in the appearance of the printed word, your ear passes the sound of the words to your brain, and even the tension of the muscles of your throat add their bit to the total impression which your mind is expected to store away.
4. Try to visualize it. Either remember a diagram or a picture of the material to be remembered, or take short notes about it, which help you to visualize.
5. Intend to remember. The mere intention to remember puts the mind in a condition to remember, and if you will make use of this fact in studying you will be able to recall between 20 and 60 percent more of what you read and hear than you would if you were not actively trying to remember.
6. Think about it. A fact doesn't belong to you until you have used it. In making use of this principle, plan to spend no more than one-half of your study period reading your lesson. Use the other half doing something with what you learn. Think about what you have studied, write down notes, and explain it to somebody else.
7. Logical memory. One of the most important of all aids to the remembering process is the habit of associating a new idea immediately with facts or ideas that are already firmly lodged in your mind. This association revives and strengthens the old memories and prevents the new one from slipping away by anchoring it to the well-established framework of your mental world.
8. Remembering by brute force. We will forget more, on average, during the first hour after learning than during the next 24 hours; and we will forget more, on average, during the first day than we will during the next thirty days. Whatever is left after thirty days' time we will probably be able to hold on to without much further loss for years to come.

9. Reviewing is much more effective if carried out before memories have entirely escaped than it is after considerable time has elapsed. Repetitions should be strung out over as long a time as is available. We remember better if we pause a little between periods of study.
10. How much to study? You should study more than just enough to learn your assignment. Experiments have proven that 50% more study time resulted in 50% better retention. After a week had passed, it was found that extra work had salvaged six times as much of the material as in the case when it was barely learned.

Bibliography

Pauk, Walter. *How to Study In College, 2nd edition*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1974.