

Effective Memorization

General principles

1. Learn from the general to the specific (build a framework or context first).
2. Make it meaningful:
 - a) create action
 - b) make pictures vivid
 - c) turn abstract ideas into concrete actions or images
3. Create associations—the more absurd, the better (e.g., in memorizing the Declaration of Independence, picture King George as a parent, professor, or boss and associate the separate clauses with your own gripes).
4. Study actively (look for answers, recite, test yourself).
5. Visualize relationships (e.g., in memorizing a physics formula, make the process into a concrete picture).
6. Recite and repeat—the more often the better.
7. Reduce interference (disruptive music, interruptions, distractions).
8. Overlearn (keep going even after you think you've learned it).
9. Be aware of attitudes (if you think the material is boring, find your own connection to it).
10. Distribute learning (a little at a time is better than long stretches of cramming).
11. Remember something related to the thing you can't recall (a related concept may spark the one you've blanked on).
12. Combine the above techniques.
13. Combine senses (look at it, say it, listen to it, and talk about it with someone else).
14. Use the material as many different ways as you can (make up charts or diagrams, solve problems, make a timeline, write a summary).
15. Group things in groups of less than seven (three or four is better—like a phone number, social security number, or zip code).
16. Use a mnemonic (“neemonic”—rhymes with demonic) technique.

Some common mnemonics:

Acronyms: Take the first letter of each word to form a new word

scuba Self
Contained
Underwater
Breathing
Apparatus

Creative sentences: Take the first letter of each word to be remembered and make up a silly sentence with words that begin with those letters

The cranial nerves:

olfactory, optic, oculomotor, trochlear, trigeminal, abducens, facial, accessory,
glossopharyngeal, vagus, spinal, hypoglossal

A mnemonic sentence:

On old Olympus' towering tops a Finn and a German viewed some hops.

Rhymes and songs: Make a rhyme or a song of the facts. You may feel silly singing to yourself, but think of all the jingles and song lyrics you know!

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(Adapted from *Becoming a Master Student* by David Ellis)