

Reading, Memory and Notes

How can I improve my learning?

Try the following methods and note down which is best for you:

1. Put a tick by any of the following active learning strategies you could try
2. Select two to try this week
3. Select two more to try in the coming months

Summarise a passage in ten words, making you think about what you have read.

Make spider diagrams, a mind map, or other patterned notes to help you remember complex ideas or topics.

Apply what you learn: think of 3 real-life examples of what you have learned.

Prioritise and evaluate: decide which example is best and why?

Explore the subject: list 5 questions about it (what, where, why, when, who, how...) and think about the answer. A great way to check you fully understand the topic.

Draw a diagram or cartoon to illustrate a theory or concept

Write action plans of things to do today, or this week, or for the term

Teach what you have learned to a real or imaginary person

Sum up the three most important points of a class

Evaluate and select: which is the most important point?

Make a wall chart linking all you have learned about an aspect of your studies

Invent three essay titles, and give yourself five minutes to write an outline for one

List all the key topics for one subject

Draw a simple picture or symbol to remind you of each topic

Discuss your ideas – or your difficulties – with other people

Write key points on index cards or post-its

Juggle them around to see how many ways you could organise the same information



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Rhyme

You are more likely to remember the words of a song or a poem rather than a paragraph from a book. That's because rhyme often sticks in your mind.

30 days have September, April, June and November.

All the rest have 31, except for February alone.

When leap year comes once in four, February then has one day more.

In fourteen hundred and ninety-two,

Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

Acrostic

One way to remember a list of words in order is to make up an acrostic, using the first letter of each word in the list, for example:

The colours of the rainbow in order, from the outside to inside are:

Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo and Violet.

They can be remembered using this acrostic:

Richard Of York Gave Battle In Vain.

Acronyms

Acronyms are similar to acrostics but they are words (as opposed to sentences) created by the first letters of a series of words.

Here are five things you might need to bring to school:

games Kit, reading Book, packed Lunch, school Trip money, Calculator

This gives you the acronym:

BLoCK iT!

Grouping

A good way to remember a long list of items is to group them into categories.

Look at this list of sports:

Skiing, basketball, netball, tennis, long jump, 100m sprint, hockey, rounders, ice-skating, discus, golf, high jump, volleyball, javelin, football, rugby, lacrosse, cricket, gymnastics, hurdles.

It is easier to remember them if you separate them into categories, e.g. athletics, sports played on a pitch, racquet sports. That way you will have fewer sports to remember per group.

Names and pictures

You are more likely to remember something out of the ordinary. Creating strange images in your head helps you remember.

For example, if a new girl called Nina joined your class and you wanted to remember her name, you could think of an object image associated with her name, for example:

- ambulance (siren sound ni-na)

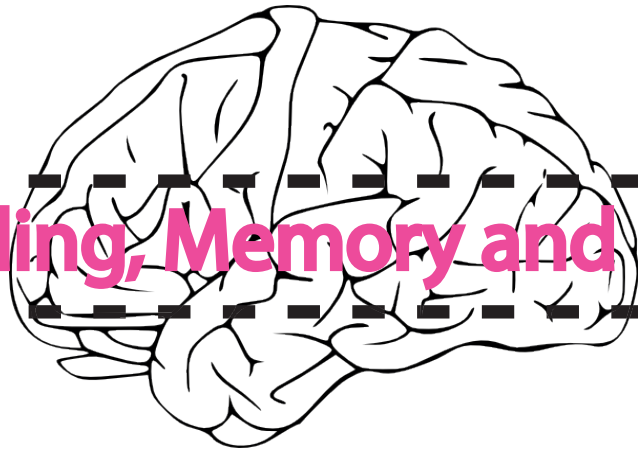
- knee (Ni-na)

- Hyena (rhymes with Nina)

Picture your classmate alongside one of these objects e.g. with a flashing siren on her head.

This strange visual image will make it easier to remember their new name.

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Journey and peg

Another way to remember a chain of information is to peg each bit on a landmark from a familiar journey.

Think of a journey you do quite regularly. This could be your route to school or the journey from your bedroom to the front door.

Write down all the landmarks you pass in order on a piece of paper; each on a separate line. Now pick some information from one of the subjects you need to learn.

Write down each bit of information next to a landmark.

Now imagine yourself making the journey, passing each bit of information pegged to each landmark. This will help you recall the details more easily.

Teach

Another good way of retaining information is to teach someone else what you have learned.

This method can help you remember 90 per cent of the information.

Using technology

There are lots of apps for your phone which enable you to create flashcards and visual reminders of facts on your phone. Some are free and some are not but if you are the type of person who can't put your phone down this might be a useful method for you.

Top student tip

Test yourself by trying to write down all you have revised in a session on a piece of blank paper. At the beginning include some key words to remind you of the different sections and fill in the information as you go along. Next time try removing the key words or memorising them then recall the facts. You may have to do this a few times to get all of the information to stick!



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Notes

Types of notes

Outline notes – record structure of an argument and main points, use headings and other devices such as bullets or numeration to provide hierarchy of points, use regular abbreviations and symbols.

Summary notes – Provide condensed version of the argument

Flow diagrams - record development of main argument and subsidiary points

Mind map (spider diagram, spray diagram) – summarise main topic and enclose it in a box or circle, draw radiating lines to sub-topics and again sub-sub topics etc, useful for analysing ideas

Other strategies – Highlighting, circling, and underlining – focus attention, encourage you to identify and think about main points, direct rereading. Mnemonics and acronyms – patterns of words or phrases to improve your memory and words formed from the initials of other words,

Revision cards – use index or flash cards to write down key points and carry them around with you everywhere so that you can revise anywhere and whenever you have spare time, post it – write down key points and stick them on places that you often go or tend to look when distracted.

Helpful Hints

- Record source of notes at the top of the page
- If taking notes from a book or article in preparation for writing an essay, record page numbers for reference purposes
- Record your own comments in a box so that you can identify them later
- Neat notes are most useful
- File notes in an organised system in order to retrieve information easily
- Note key words and main ideas
- Use phrases and abbreviations rather than sentences
- Number pages

Are your notes helpful? Are they...?

- Easy to read
- Brief and to the point
- Easy to understand
- Well organised
- Numbered or labelled
- Easy to learn from
- Well abbreviated with important ideas standing out clearly