

Learning Skills, Room 120

Memory Aids

Here are some techniques that are useful in memorizing:

1. **Study actively:** You are more likely to remember material if you write it down or say it out loud than if you merely read it or hear it.
2. **Make sure you understand:** If you understand what you are trying to learn, you will find that you can remember it better and for a longer period.
3. **Associate new information with old:** When learning something new, try to compare it with something similar that you are already familiar with.
4. **Make up examples:** When learning general principles, try to make up examples of your own. In addition to helping you better remember the principles, this will also help you check your understanding. If you are not sure that your example is correct, check it with your teacher.
5. **Visualize what you are trying to learn:** This can involve creating a mental image or drawing a graph (a timeline to help with time sequences, a hierarchical chart for organizations or family trees, etc.)
6. **Group items into categories:** If you must learn a long list of things, try to group similar items together. For example, to memorize a shopping list you would want to group vegetables together, meats together, dairy products, and so on.
7. **Be selective:** Most of the time you will not be able to memorize every detail, and if you try you may end up learning almost nothing. Concentrate on general concepts and a few examples to go with each. Pay attention to information the teacher indicates is important (information written on the chalkboard, or repeated several times orally, or prefaced by statements such as “You should know this.”).
8. **Space your study session:** You are more apt to remember material if you study over several days rather than in one crash session.
9. **Use key words:** For example, to learn this list of suggestions for improving your memory, pick out a key word for each suggestion and then learn just the key words. To learn items 1 through 9, you might choose the following key words: active, understand, associate, examples, visualize, group, selective, space, key words.
10. **Learn how many items are on the list:** When learning lists, make sure you learn the number of items on the list. For example, in item 9, it is not enough to learn the key words. You also should learn that there are nine items. This will aid you in recalling all the items.
11. **Rhymes and sayings can be helpful:** For example, how many of us can remember the number of days in the months without:

Thirty days has September,
April June, and November.
All the rest have thirty-one,

Excepting February alone,
Which has just four and twenty-four,
And every leap year one day more.

12. **Use alliteration.** Repeating initial sounds can be helpful in remembering information. For example, to remind sailors entering a harbour to keep the red light on their right, they learn:

Red to the right returning

13. **Try acrostics.** Sometimes you can use the first letter of a list of words to form another word or sentence. These are referred to as *acrostics* and are similar to acronyms. For example, “ROY G. BIV” can help us remember the colours of the spectrum: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet.
14. **Exaggerate.** This is especially helpful when you are using visualization. Try to make your images big, colourful, and with lots of details. This will make them more interesting and easier to remember.
15. **Have confidence.** Don’t go around saying, “I can’t remember names.” You can if you try.
16. **Use a mnemonic device.** This is especially useful when memorizing a list of anything.