

Memory Improvement Tips

Do you find yourself forgetting where you left your keys or blanking out information on important tests? Fortunately, there are things that you can do to help improve your memory. Before your next big exam, be sure to check out some of these tried and tested techniques for improving memory. These strategies have been established within cognitive psychology literature to improve memory, enhance recall and increase retention of information.

1. Focus your attention on the materials you are studying.

Attention is one of the major components of memory. In order for information to move from short-term memory into long-term memory, you need to actively attend to this information. Try to study in a place free of distractions such as television, music and other diversions.

2. Avoid cramming by establishing regular study sessions.

According to Bjork (2001), studying materials over a number of sessions gives you the time you need to adequately process the information. Research has shown that students who study regularly remember the material far better than those who do all of their studying in one marathon session.

3. Structure and organize the information you are studying.

Researchers have found that information is organized in memory in related clusters. You can take advantage of this by structuring and organizing the materials you are studying. Try grouping similar concepts and terms together, or make an outline of your notes and textbook readings to help group related concepts.

4. Utilize mnemonic devices to remember information.

Mnemonic devices are a technique often used by students to aid in recall. A mnemonic is simply a way to remember information. For example, you might associate a term you need to remember with a common item that you are very familiar with. The best mnemonics are those that utilize positive imagery, humor or novelty. You might come up with a rhyme, song or joke to help remember a specific segment of information.

5. Elaborate and rehearse the information you are studying.

In order to recall information, you need to encode what you are studying into long-term memory. One of the most effective encoding techniques is known as elaborative rehearsal. An example of this technique would be to read the definition of a key term, study the definition of that term and then read a more detailed description of what that term means. After repeating this process a few times, you'll probably notice that recalling the information is much easier.

6. Relate new information to things you already know.

When you are studying unfamiliar material, take the time to think about how this information relates to things that you already know. By establishing relationships between new ideas and previously existing memories, you can dramatically increase the likelihood of recalling the recently learned information.

7. Visualize concepts to improve memory and recall.

Many people benefit greatly from visualizing the information they study. Pay attention to the photographs, charts and other graphics in your textbooks. If you do not have visual cues to help, try creating your own. Draw charts or figures in the margins of your notes or use highlighters or pens in different colors to group related ideas in your written study materials.

8. Teach new concepts to another person.

Research suggests that reading materials out loud significantly improves memory of the material. Educators and psychologists have also discovered that having students actually teach new concepts to others enhances understanding and recall. You can use this approach in your own studies by teaching new concepts and information to a friend or study partner.

9. Pay extra attention to difficult information.

Have you ever noticed how it's sometimes easier to remember information at the beginning or end of a chapter? Researchers have found that the order of information can play a role in recall, which is known as the serial position effect. While recalling middle information can be difficult, you can overcome this problem by spending extra time rehearsing this information. Another strategy is to try restructuring what you have learned so it will be easier to remember. When you come across an especially difficult concept, devote some extra time to memorizing the information.

10. Vary your study routine.

Another great way to increase your recall is to occasionally change your study routine. If you are accustomed to studying in one specific location, try moving to a different spot during your next study session. If you study in the evening, try spending a few minutes each morning

reviewing the information you studied the previous night. By adding an element of novelty to your study sessions, you can increase the effectiveness of your efforts and significantly improve your long-term recall.

Question: What Is Short-Term Memory?

Answer: Short-term memory, also known as primary or active memory, is the information we are currently aware of or thinking about. In Freudian psychology, this memory would be referred to as the conscious mind. The information found in short term memory comes from paying attention to sensory memories.

The Duration of Short-Term Memory

Most of the information kept in short-term memory will be stored for approximately 20 to 30 seconds, but it can be just seconds if rehearsal or active maintenance of the information is prevented. While many of our short-term memories are quickly forgotten, attending to this information allows it to continue on the next stage - long-term memory.

The Capacity of Short-Term Memory

The amount of information that can be stored in short-term memory can vary. An often cited figure is plus or minus seven items, based on the results of a famous experiment on short-term memory. In an influential paper titled "The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two," psychologist George Miller suggested that people can store between five and nine items in short-term memory. More recent research suggests that people are capable of storing approximately four chunks or pieces of information in short-term memory.

Distinction Between Short-Term Memory and Working Memory

Short-term memory is often used interchangeably with working memory, but the two should be utilized separately. Working memory refers to the processes that are used to temporarily store, organize and manipulate information. Short-term memory, on the other hand, refers only to the temporary storage of information in memory.

Question: What Is Long-Term Memory?

Answer: Long-term memory refers to the continuing storage of information. In Freudian psychology, long-term memory would be called the preconscious and unconscious. This information is largely outside of our awareness, but can be called into working memory to be used when needed. Some of this information is fairly easy to recall, while other memories are much more difficult to access.

The Duration of Long-Term Memory

Through the process of association and rehearsal, the content of short-term memory can become long-term memory. While long-term memory is also susceptible to the forgetting process, long-term memories can last for a matter of days to as long as many decades.

Types of Long-Term Memory

Long-term memory is usually divided into two types - declarative (explicit) memory and procedural (implicit) memory.

- Declarative includes all of the memories that are available in consciousness. Declarative memory can be further divided into episodic memory (specific events) and semantic memory (knowledge about the world).

- Procedural memory involves memories of body movement and how to use objects in the environment. How to drive a car or use a computer are examples of procedural memories.

10 Facts About Memory

1. Our memory helps make us who we are. From fondly recollecting childhood events to remembering where we left our keys, memory plays a vital role in every aspect of our lives. It provides us with a sense of self and makes up our continual experience of life. It's easy to think of memory as a mental filing cabinet, storing away bits of information until we need them. In reality, it is a remarkably complex process that involves numerous parts of the brain. Memories can be vivid and long-lasting, but they are also susceptible to inaccuracies and forgetting. Continue reading to learn more about some of the most interesting aspects of human memory.

2. The hippocampus is a horse-shoe shaped area of the brain that plays an important role in consolidating information from short-term memory into long-term memory. It is part of the limbic system, a system associated with emotions and long-term memories. The hippocampus is involved in such complex processes as forming, organizing, and storing memories.

3. Being Tested On Information Actually Helps You Remember It Better. While it may seem like studying and rehearsing information is the best way to ensure that you will remember it, researchers have found that being tested on information is actually one of the best ways to improve recall.

4. Most Short-Term Memories Are Quickly Forgotten

5. You Can Learn to Improve Your Memory. Do you ever feel like you are constantly forgetting things or misplacing objects that you use every day? Have you ever found yourself walking into a room only to realize that you can't remember why you went in there in the first place? While it might seem like you are doomed to simply tolerate these daily annoyances, researchers have found that you can learn how to improve your memory. A 2005 cover story in the Monitor on Psychology summarized research revealing a number of useful strategies to deal with mild memory loss. These techniques include:

- Utilizing technology to keep track of information. Tools such as hand-held mobile devices and online reminder calendars can help people keep track of appointments and other important dates. Using a reminder app on your phone can be a handy way to stay on top of important dates and events.

- Taking a "mental picture" can help. Systematically trying to make a mental note of things you often forget (such as where you left your car keys) can help you remember things better. The next time you set your keys down somewhere, take a moment to mentally note where you left them as well as the other objects that were nearby. If you think to yourself "I left my keys by my wallet on the desk," you'll probably find it easier to recall the information later.

- Use memorization techniques. Rehearsing information, employing mnemonics, and other memorization strategies are perhaps the best ways to overcome minor memory problems. By learning how to use these strategies effectively, you can sidestep the faulty areas of your memory and train your brain to function in new ways.

6. There Are Four Major Reasons Why You Forget Things

In order to combat forgetfulness, it is important to understand some of the major reasons *why* we forget things. Elizabeth Loftus, one of the world's most renowned experts on human memory, has identified four major reasons why forgetting occurs. One of the most common explanations is a simple failure to retrieve the information from memory. This often occurs when memories are rarely accessed, causing them to decay over time.

Another common cause of forgetting is interference, which occurs when some memories compete with other memories. For example, imagine that a woman just started a new school year as an elementary school teacher. She spends some time learning the names of each of her students, but over the course of the year she finds herself constantly calling one particular girl by the wrong name. Why? Because the girl's older sister was in the same class the year before, and the two look remarkably similar. It is the memory of the older sister that makes it so difficult to recall the younger student's name.

Other causes of forgetting include failing to store the information in memory in the first place, or even intentionally trying to forget things associated with a troubling or traumatic event.

7. Scent Can Be a Powerful Memory Trigger

8. New Brain Connections Are Created Every Time You Form a Memory

9. A Good Night's Sleep May Improve Your Memory

10. Memory Failure in Old-Age Might Not Be Inevitable. While old age is often associated with memory declines, some elderly adults are able to maintain their memory throughout old age