Improve Your Memory

Vocabulary Review

your senses are psychologically conditioned mnemonic techniques

How is your memory? When you are introduced to a lady at a social gathering, do you remember her name or do you almost immediately forget it and then spend several minutes trying to find some sneaky way to get her to repeat it? If you do the food shopping for your family, do you always refer to a shopping list (which you sometimes forget to take with you)? At school, is it a problem to remember the ten causes or the eight qualities or the nine characteristics or perhaps basic formulas or statistical information? Well, if so, it’s time for a change. You can improve your memory fantastically if you want to. You can learn to remember anything you want to remember for as long as you want to remember it. Business executives can learn to remember names and faces and important appointments and critical statistical information. Waitresses can learn to remember orders without having to write them down. Postal workers can learn to remember street names and numbers. Inventory clerks can remember numbers relating to stocked parts. You can learn to remember your Social Security number, your license plate number, important telephone numbers and at least a three-year calendar without looking it up.

All over the country memory experts are conducting seminars and workshops to help people improve their memory. The author of this book, Professor Irwin L. Joffe, conducts a memory workshop for groups of business people, or students, or the general public and has helped many hundreds of people to improve their memories fantastically and to feel just great about it. It does take work and practice, but it can be done and it is well worth it. Whether fortunately or unfortunately, more than 75 percent of the material covered in college classes is a memory task rather than concept development and students with good memory skills can get good grades with less effort.

How can you do all of this? Memory is composed of three factors—input, storage, and retrieval. Input is achieved through the senses. Information enters your physiological system through one or more of the sense organs—you hear or see or smell or touch or taste something. This sense impression is translated into impulses that travel via your nervous system to the brain where, under normal conditions, it is stored. One problem here is that if your senses perceive information incorrectly because they are damaged or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs or otherwise psychologically conditioned, that incorrect information will be translated and carried to the brain that way, and it will be stored that way. Your brain is now holding that information, whether correctly or incorrectly perceived, and it holds it there for future retrieval.

How many times have you tried to remember something and you know it’s there (on the “tip of the tongue”) but you just can’t seem to remember it? You need a retrieval system, which is what memory workshops are all about. A mnemonic device is a retrieval technique. The work mnemonic, which comes from Mnemosyne, the Greek goddess of memory, refers to a technique for remembering. Memory workshops stress these techniques, such as pegging, linking, and strategies of progressive elaboration. These techniques refer to ways of associating items. Let us say that two items on your shopping list are eggs and milk. One way to remember these is to link them so that they are locked together. If you think of one of them, the other will automatically come to mind. You do
this by using as much of ASOE as you can. ASOE stands for
action, substitution, out of proportion, and exaggeration.
You also need to develop as lively and as strong an imagi-
nation as possible. The wilder your imagination, the
better.
To return to eggs and milk—how can you link them in as
imaginative a way as possible? You might want to imagine
a chicken laying small milk cartons, or you might see
yourself opening a milk carton to pour a glass of milk, but
eggs come out instead of milk. You might open an egg
carton and see a dozen milk cartons smiling at you, or you
might see yourself cracking eggs open and milk comes out,
or you might be milking a cow but eggs fall into the pail.
The important thing is don’t just see a carton of milk
standing next to a carton of eggs. This will probably not
help you to remember them because it is too weak a link. It
doesn’t have enough ASOE. Also, it is important to imag-
the two items rather than to intellectualize them. You
must see them in your mind’s eye, not just think about
them. Then you will lock them together.
Everything you remember is remembered by associa-
tion (of which linking is only one technique). What is the
second line of our national anthem? Think about it before
reading on. Didn’t you have to say the first line (“Oh, say
can you see”) before you could remember the second line
(“By the dawn’s early light”)? You really don’t remember
the second line. You only remember the first line, which
reminds you of the second line, which reminds you of the
third line and so on.
The linking technique is one of the least sophisticated
mnemonic systems and yet it is amazingly effective. Re-
turn to the shopping list. Suppose that in addition to eggs
and milk you plan to purchase the following six items:
peas, apples, hot dogs, cigarettes, cake, and strawberries.
You have already imagined an egg carton that you open
and find a dozen little milk cartons smiling and waving at
you. (The smiling and waving strengthens the link because
of the action component of ASOE.) Pick up one of the milk
cartons and open it. Now pour. Peas tumble into the glass.
Look at the peas in your mind. They are filling up the glass
and overflowing onto the table where they run and jump.
Now look at one of the peas. It is very proud and is swelling
up and getting bigger and bigger and bigger and look—it
has become an apple. Do you see that green, smiling ap-
ple? Pick it up and squeeze it hard. As you squeeze, hot
dogs emerge from the apple. See the hot dogs clearly in
your mind. Forget the apple temporarily. See the hot dogs
jumping into a cigarette package and the package sealing
up. You now see a pack of cigarettes (any brand you desire,
but do see a particular brand). Forget the hot dogs tem-
porarily. See the cigarettes. The package is opening and
the cigarettes are climbing out, one at a time, and placing
themselves on top of a cake as if they were candles. Do you
see those cigarettes on the cake? Now look at the cake.
Forget the cigarettes temporarily. Just see the cake. It is a
strawberry shortcake and the strawberries are very deep
red and stand out vividly against the white cream.
Now stop for a moment. Go back to the first picture that
you saw in your mind. Can you recall the egg carton and
the dozen little milk cartons in it? Now think only of the
milk cartons. What do you see? The peas are pouring out.
Look at the peas, or at least look at one of them. Can you
recall it puffing up and becoming an apple? Now look at
the apple. Does it help remind you of the hot dog? Look at
the hot dogs, what are they doing? (Becoming cigarettes?)
Look at the cigarettes. Are they on the (birthday) cake? See
the cake. What kind of cake do you see? Don’t the straw-
berries look delicious? Now try to recite the eight items of
your shopping list from memory. Can you remember
them? (Eggs, milk, peas, apples, hot dogs, cigarettes, cake,
and strawberries.)
Two important points should be made here. First, the
illustration just given is a modified form of linking some-
times known as progressive elaboration, where the items
are linked into a kind of story. This isn’t always possible or
even desirable. However, just pure linking would be
equally effective. You might have seen the milk in the egg
carton, then the milk carton pouring peas, then perhaps
peas being picked off of an apple tree, then an apple on a
stick except that the stick is a hot dog, then the hot dog
being smoked by someone, and finally strawberries rising
from the lit end of a cigarette instead of smoke. A second
important point is that the research has shown that it is
the things that you make up and imagine that are most
effective. The above way of linking the eight items are the
author’s suggestions and they may work, but the most
effective strategy is for you to make up your own links.
What should you do if you forget one or two items on a
list? Strengthen these with more ASOE; especially give
them more action.
There are other even more effective techniques that are
used to remember lists of items or to remember names and
dates, or even to remember things in less time, thus taking a lot of hassle out of school and/or
the job. It can help you to improve grades or advance on
the job or even be a winning card player. Some people feel
that using mnemonic techniques is not a good thing to do
because it makes the mind lazy or because a person be-
comes too dependent upon it. That is not so. If you need to
remember certain information several times over a period
of time you will find that you will soon remember the
information and forget the mnemonic device that you
used to arrive at it. This author remembers certain tele-
phone numbers that are needed once or twice a month
that were originally learned through a mnemonic device
(a phonetic peg). However, the peg is no longer remem-
bered. It is like using a crutch to help you walk when you
need it, but when your foot no longer needs the crutch, you
throw it away.
You can learn to improve your memory. It can make
your life easier and even happier. Wouldn’t it be foolish
not to give it a try?
Selection 10 Comprehension Questions

Decide whether each of the following questions is true or false according to the selection. Then mark T or F in the appropriate place.

1. Using mnemonic techniques makes the mind lazy. 
2. Information enters your physiological system through the sense organs.
3. In order to develop a good memory you need to develop a good imagination and you must lie a lot.
4. School work is about 25 percent memory and 75 percent concept development.
5. Linking is a type of association.

Choose the correct answer for each of the following questions and circle the letter before it.

6. The reason why just seeing a carton of milk standing next to a carton of eggs is not a good link is:
   a. It has too much ASOE.
   b. It is too ridiculous.
   c. It doesn't have enough action.
   d. It might make you hungry, which is distracting.

7. Which of the following items was not on the shopping list?
   a. peas
   b. whipped cream
   c. hot dogs
   d. cigarettes

8. Mnemonic systems are really systems for achieving
   a. psychological conditioning
   b. development of the sense organs
   c. imagination
   d. retrieval

9. Which of the following is a correct statement according to the selection?
   a. Using alcohol or other drugs sharpens your mind and helps you to develop a good memory.
   b. Memory workshops are only 75 percent effective.
   c. People become too dependent upon memory techniques.
   d. You can learn to remember anything you want to.

10. Which two items are needed for a good memory?
    a. Imagination and association
    b. A lazy mind and imagination
    c. ASOE and good intelligence
    d. The ability to understand concepts and the ability to exaggerate