

SELECTION 10

Improve Your Memory

Vocabulary Review

your senses are *psychologically conditioned*
mnemonic techniques

1 How is your memory? When you are introduced to a
2 lady at a social gathering, do you remember her name or
3 do you almost immediately forget it and then spend sev-
4 eral minutes trying to find some sneaky way to get her to
5 repeat it? If you do the food shopping for your family, do
6 you always refer to a shopping list (which you sometimes
7 forget to take with you)? At school, is it a problem to
8 remember the ten causes or the eight qualities or the nine
9 characteristics or perhaps basic formulas or statistical
10 information? Well, if so, it's time for a change. You can
11 improve your memory fantastically if you want to. You
12 can learn to remember anything you want to remember
13 for as long as you want to remember it. Business execu-
14 tives can learn to remember names and faces and impor-
15 tant appointments and critical statistical information.
16 Waitresses can learn to remember orders without having
17 to write them down. Postal workers can learn to re-
18 member street names and numbers. Inventory clerks can
19 remember numbers relating to stocked parts. You can
20 learn to remember your Social Security number, your
21 license plate number, important telephone numbers and

22 at least a three-year calendar without looking it up.
23 All over the country memory experts are conducting
24 seminars and workshops to help people improve their
25 memory. The author of this book, Professor Irwin L. Joffe,
26 conducts a memory workshop for groups of business
27 people, or students, or the general public and has helped
28 many hundreds of people to improve their memories fan-
29 tastically and to feel just great about it. It does take work
30 and practice, but it can be done and it is well worth it.
31 Whether fortunately or unfortunately, more than 75 per-
32 cent of the material covered in college classes is a memory
33 task rather than concept development and students with
34 good memory skills can get good grades with less effort.
35 How can you do all of this? Memory is composed of three
36 factors—input, storage, and retrieval. Input is achieved
37 through the senses. Information enters your physiological
38 system through one or more of the sense organs—you hear
39 or see or smell or touch or taste something. This sense
40 impression is translated into impulses that travel via your
41 nervous system to the brain where, under normal condi-
42 tions, it is stored. One problem here is that if your senses
43 perceive information incorrectly because they are dam-
44 aged or under the influence of alcohol or other drugs or
45 otherwise psychologically conditioned, that incorrect in-
46 formation will be translated and carried to the brain that
47 way, and it will be stored that way. Your brain is now
48 holding that information, whether correctly or incorrectly
49 perceived, and it holds it there for future retrieval.
50 How many times have you tried to remember some-
51 thing and you know it's there (on the "tip of the tongue")
52 but you just can't seem to remember it? You need a re-
53 trieval system, which is what memory workshops are all
54 about. A mnemonic device is a retrieval technique. The
55 work *mnemonic*, which comes from Mnemosyne, the
56 Greek goddess of memory, refers to a technique for re-
57 membering. Memory workshops stress these techniques,
58 such as pegging, linking, and strategies of progressive
59 elaboration. These techniques refer to ways of associating
60 items. Let us say that two items on your shopping list are
61 eggs and milk. One way to remember these is to link them
62 so that they are locked together. If you think of one of
63 them, the other will automatically come to mind. You do

64 this by using as much of ASOE as you can. ASOE stands for
65 action, substitution, out of proportion, and exaggeration.
66 You also need to develop as lively and as strong an imag-
67 ination as possible. The wilder your imagination, the
68 better.

69 To return to eggs and milk—how can you link them in as
70 imaginative a way as possible? You might want to imagine
71 a chicken laying small milk cartons, or you might see
72 yourself opening a milk carton to pour a glass of milk, but
73 eggs come out instead of milk. You might open an egg
74 carton and see a dozen milk cartons smiling at you, or you
75 might see yourself cracking eggs open and milk comes out,
76 or you might be milking a cow but eggs fall into the pail.
77 The important thing is don't just see a carton of milk
78 standing next to a carton of eggs. This will probably not
79 help you to remember them because it is too weak a link. It
80 doesn't have enough ASOE. Also, it is important to imag-
81 ine the two items rather than to intellectualize them. You
82 must see them in your mind's eye, not just think about
83 them. Then you will lock them together.

84 Everything you remember is remembered by associa-
85 tion (of which linking is only one technique). What is the
86 second line of our national anthem? Think about it before
87 reading on. Didn't you have to say the first line ("Oh, say
88 can you see") before you could remember the second line
89 ("By the dawn's early light")? You really don't remember
90 the second line. You only remember the first line, which
91 reminds you of the second line, which reminds you of the
92 third line and so on.

93 The linking technique is one of the least sophisticated
94 mnemonic systems and yet it is amazingly effective. Re-
95 turn to the shopping list. Suppose that in addition to eggs
96 and milk you plan to purchase the following six items:
97 peas, apples, hot dogs, cigarettes, cake, and strawberries.
98 You have already imagined an egg carton that you open
99 and find a dozen little milk cartons smiling and waving at
100 you. (The smiling and waving strengthens the link because
101 of the action component of ASOE.) Pick up one of the milk
102 cartons and open it. Now pour. Peas tumble into the glass.
103 Look at the peas in your mind. They are filling up the glass
104 and overflowing onto the table where they run and jump.
105 Now look at one of the peas. It is very proud and is swelling

106 up and getting bigger and bigger and bigger and look—it
107 has become an apple. Do you see that green, smiling ap-
108 ple? Pick it up and squeeze it hard. As you squeeze, hot
109 dogs emerge from the apple. See the hot dogs clearly in
110 your mind. Forget the apple temporarily. See the hot dogs
111 jumping into a cigarette package and the package sealing
112 up. You now see a pack of cigarettes (any brand you desire,
113 but do see a particular brand). Forget the hot dogs tem-
114 porarily. See the cigarettes. The package is opening and
115 the cigarettes are climbing out, one at a time, and placing
116 themselves on top of a cake as if they were candles. Do you
117 see those cigarettes on the cake? Now look at the cake.
118 Forget the cigarettes temporarily. Just see the cake. It is a
119 strawberry shortcake and the strawberries are very deep
120 red and stand out vividly against the white cream.

121 Now stop for a moment. Go back to the first picture that
122 you saw in your mind. Can you recall the egg carton and
123 the dozen little milk cartons in it? Now think only of the
124 milk cartons. What do you see? The peas are pouring out.
125 Look at the peas, or at least look at one of them. Can you
126 recall it puffing up and becoming an apple? Now look at
127 the apple. Does it help remind you of the hot dog? Look at
128 the hot dogs, what are they doing? (Becoming cigarettes?)
129 Look at the cigarettes. Are they on the (birthday) cake? See
130 the cake. What kind of cake do you see? Don't the straw-
131 berries look delicious? Now try to recite the eight items of
132 your shopping list from memory. Can you remember
133 them? (Eggs, milk, peas, apples, hot dogs, cigarettes, cake,
134 and strawberries.)

135 Two important points should be made here. First, the
136 illustration just given is a modified form of linking some-
137 times known as progressive elaboration, where the items
138 are linked into a kind of story. This isn't always possible or
139 even desirable. However, just pure linking would be
140 equally effective. You might have seen the milk in the egg
141 carton, then the milk carton pouring peas, then perhaps
142 peas being picked off of an apple tree, then an apple on a
143 stick except that the stick is a hot dog, then the hot dog
144 being smoked by someone, and finally strawberries rising
145 from the lit end of a cigarette instead of smoke. A second
146 important point is that the research has shown that it is
147 the things that *you* make up and imagine that are most

148 effective. The above way of linking the eight items are the
149 author's suggestions and they may work, but the most
150 effective strategy is for *you* to make up your own links.

151 What should you do if you forget one or two items on a
152 list? Strengthen these with more ASOE; especially give
153 them more action.

154 There are other even more effective techniques that are
155 used to remember lists of items or to remember names and
156 faces and numbers or formulas. Mnemonic techniques
157 really work effectively and can allow students, business
158 executives, and other people to remember more things in
159 less time, thus taking a lot of hassle out of school and/or
160 the job. It can help you to improve grades or advance on
161 the job or even be a winning card player. Some people feel
162 that using mnemonic techniques is not a good thing to do
163 because it makes the mind lazy or because a person be-
164 comes too dependent upon it. That is not so. If you need to
165 remember certain information several times over a period
166 of time you will find that you will soon remember the
167 information and forget the mnemonic device that you
168 used to arrive at it. This author remembers certain tele-
169 phone numbers that are needed once or twice a month
170 that were originally learned through a mnemonic device
171 (a phonetic peg). However, the peg is no longer remem-
172 bered. It is like using a crutch to help you walk when you
173 need it, but when your foot no longer needs the crutch, you
174 throw it away.

175 You *can* learn to improve your memory. It can make
176 your life easier and even happier. Wouldn't it be foolish
177 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