

# Memory Mechanics

Taken from *Surviving College Successfully* by Gary DeMar and *A Biblical Psychology of Learning* by Ruth Beechick.

Short-term memory has a limited holding capacity of about seven items, plus or minus two. This means that normal adults can repeat at least five digits immediately after hearing them. But, how do we get information to transfer from short-term memory to long-term memory?

1. **Distribute the practice.**  
Spend **a few minutes** on the material a few times a week in order to retain it.
2. **Concentrate.**  
Rehearse the line to yourself for ten seconds, **without interruption**. This allows time for new patterns of retrieval to be made in the brain's circuits.
3. **Process the information.**  
Usually this is done by **coding it**.
  - a. **Imagery** - learning by **associating an image** with an item you want to remember. As in making your grocery list into vivid mental images.
  - b. **Semantic** - **add meaning** to what you want to remember. Evaluate it in some way, form an opinion, compare it with past learning or observe more closely to note details. You are looking for **associations to remember** it by. **Example:** when you are introduced to someone you compare their appearance, etc. to someone you already know, such as "She looks a little like Aunt Ellie, although probably younger."
  - c. **Condense** the material into **outlines** or other kinds of **notes**.
4. **For memorizing literary material (Scripture), use the "Whole method".**
  - a. It is **more efficient**; more meaning is understood; and **longer retention** is gained.
  - b. It is done by **reading the whole passage**, with concentration, several times. After a few days, try saying the parts you know- and reading the parts you don't know, still going through the whole chapter. Put **extra work on difficult parts**, if necessary. **Over learn**. Possibilities for practicing include: **using a tape recorder in your car; having someone listen and prompt you, or simply read; covering up the chapter until you need prompting**. A smooth recitation of the whole chapter will be the result; plus, taking less time to master the material.

## Methods of Association to Try

**Acronym** is a word made up of the first letters of a list of names, terms, places, etc. The **initials are pronounced to form a new word**, either real or something pronounceable such as: **NATO, NASA, HUD, etc.**

**Acrostic** uses initials that are not pronounced but are **used to form new words** that make a sentence. For example: "**Every Good Boy Does Fine**" teaches the notes of the treble clef that appear on the lines: **E-G-B-D-F**; or "**My Very Excellent Mother Sells Nuts Until Passover**" is an acrostic for the order of the planets: **Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, Uranus, and Pluto.**

**Visualization** is **picturing what you read or want to recall**. Example: visualize the three branches of government as a triangle with each side representing one branch. Then visualize that triangle perched on a *branch* of a cherry tree in Washington, D.C.

An adaptation of this technique is the "**Location System.**" Roman orators commonly used this system to remember the points of a speech. Along the way from the speaker's house to the Forum, he would **associate a familiar landmark with the points of his speech**. As he delivered his speech, he would recall the landmarks in order of their place along the route and each speech point as well.

**Vocalization, Rhymes, and Jingles** For the auditory learner, **repeating the information aloud**, giving emphases to the main points with greater inflection, may help. Turning the material into **a rhyme or jingle may also help** you retain it. As in "**spring ahead, fall back**" to help one remember what to do as Daylight Savings Time comes and goes.

**Abbreviation** is used to **shorten a long section** of material into its essential parts. As with the Bill of Rights:

1. Freedom of: religion, speech, press, assembly, petition.
2. Right to bear arms.
3. Quartering of soldiers.
4. Search and seizure. Etc.

**Memory Connections** are used to remember a sequence of events that have to be in order. How does it work? By **associating the first fact** with the **second fact**, the second fact with the third fact, the third fact with the fourth fact, etc. As with the **Minor Prophets**:

1. Hosea: **Hose** spraying out **jewels** instead of water.

2. Joel: **Jewels** falling on a **moss**-covered arrow.
3. Amos: A **moss**-covered arrow aimed at an **oboe** player.
4. Obadiah: The **oboe** player meets **Jonah** in a whale.
5. Jonah: **Jonah** goes to a **microphone** to sing.
6. Micah: The **microphone** sends out a **hum**.

So it goes like this, visualize a *hose* (Hosea) spewing out *jewels* (Joel). The *jewels* come out and smash into a man aiming a *moss* (Amos)-covered arrow at a man playing an *Oboe* (Obadiah). His playing is so bad that he is swallowed by a whale where he happens to meet *Jonah*. Jonah tells his story using a *microphone* (Micah), but the only sound that anyone hears is a gentle *hum* (Nahum), etc. **Use the visualization process to recall the sequence of the events.**

**From the Abstract to the Concrete** Work on **turning abstract ideas into concrete symbols** in order to remember them better.

| <b>Abstract Concept</b> | <b>Concrete Symbol</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Intelligence or Mind    | Brain                  |
| Grief                   | Someone in tears       |
| Peace                   | Dove or olive branch   |
| Ignorance               | Dunce cap              |
| Security                | Padlock or vault       |
| Hope                    | Anchor                 |
| Speed                   | Sprinter or race car   |
| Language                | Dictionary             |
| Death                   | Coffin                 |

**The Six Serving Men** Follow Rudyard Kipling's advice about how to get the most information out of a lesson:

**I keep six honest serving men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are *What* and *Why* and *When*  
and *How* and *Where* and *Who*.**

By **answering these questions**, you will retrieve key information. They are also a great way to organize information that you read.

**Flash Cards** can be used **for learning vocabulary, definitions, etc.** Put the term on one side, its definition, answer, etc. on the back side. All the memory techniques discussed thus far can be applied to the flash card approach.

**SQ3R: Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review.** This author adds: **Preview.**

**Preview:** **Look at any introductory material** that is supplied with the material that you are about to survey. **Table of contents**, etc.

**Survey:** Reading **boldfaced type, topic sentences, summary paragraphs,** and **review questions.**

**Question:** Ask yourself **what will be the important information** contained in the assignment. Turn the boldfaced type or the topic sentences into questions.

**Read: Read for ideas,** one section at a time.

**Recite: Answer the questions** you have asked, without looking at your notes or at the notebook. Go on to the next section. **Repeat** the Read, Recite cycle until finished.

**Review:** After the above is finished, look away from the book, **go over your notes,** and get a comprehensive grasp of the complete assignment,

**"God has equipped all of us with the ability to memorize. Practice will make it work better." (201)**