

Free Tips

Using Memory Effectively



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1. **Acronyms and Acrostics: (for information involving key words)**

An acronym is an invented combination of letters. Each letter is a cue to an idea you need to remember. Example: BRASS is an acronym for how to shoot a rifle — Breath, Relax, Aim, Sight, Squeeze.

An acrostic is an invented sentence where the first letter of each word is a cue to an idea you need to remember. Example: EVERY GOOD BY DESERVES FUN is an acrostic to remember the order of G-clef notes on sheet music — E, G, B, D, F.

2. **Rhyme-Keys: (for ordered or unordered lists)**

First, memorize key words that can be associated with numbers. For instance, bun with one; shoe with two, tree with three, door with four, hive with five, etc.

Next create an image of the items you need to remember with key words. For example, if you had to remember the four basic food groups-- dairy products; meat, fish, and poultry; grains; and fruit and vegetables--imagine cheese on a bun, livestock with shoes on, a sack of grain suspended in a tree, and opening a door to a room stocked with fruits and vegetables.

3. **The Method of Loci: (for approximately twenty items)**

Select any location that you have spent a lot of time in and have easily memorized. Imagine yourself walking through the location, selecting clearly defined places--the door, sofa, refrigerator, shelf, etc. Imagine yourself putting objects that you need to remember into each of these places by walking through this location in a direct path. Again, you need a standard direct path and clearly defined locations for objects to facilitate the retrieval of these objects. For example if you had to remember George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Richard Nixon, you could imagine walking up to the door of your location and seeing a dollar bill stuck in the door; when you open the door Jefferson is reclining on the sofa and Nixon is eating out of the refrigerator.

4. **The Keyword Method: (for foreign language vocabulary)**

First, after considering the foreign word you need to remember, select a key word in English that sounds like the foreign word. Next, imagine an image which involves the key word with the English meaning of the foreign word.

For example, consider the Spanish word "cabina" which means "phone booth." For the English keyword, you might think of "cab in a" You could then invent an image of a cab trying to fit in a phone booth. When you see the word "cabina" on the test, you should be able to recall the image of the cab and you should be able to retrieve the definition "phone booth."

5. **The Image-Name Technique: (for remembering names)**

Simply invent any relationship between the name and the physical characteristics of the person. For example, if you had to remember Shirley Temple's name, you might ingrain the name in memory by noticing that she has "curly" (rhymes with Shirley) hair around her temples.

6. **Chaining: (for ordered or unordered lists)**

Create a story where each word or idea you have to remember cues the next idea you need to recall. If you had to remember the words Napoleon, ear, door, and Germany, you could invent a story of Napoleon with his ear to a door listening to people speak in German.

Adapted by Bob Nelson from *The Complete Problem Solver* by J.R. Hayes, 1989.

