

How to develop an amazing memory

By Jane Smith

Your memory is not just about recalling facts or past events, passing exams or finding your car keys. Everything you do during the day – every idea, every conscious or unconscious physical or mental activity – is actually a function of your memory. It's perhaps the most important of your human faculties; it's responsible for making you what you are today.

The fact is that that your memory, like that of every other human being, is truly magnificent. The tiny percentage of things that you might forget pales into insignificance compared to the hundreds of thousands of things that you **do** remember – without even thinking about it.

However like many people you may be feeling that you would like to develop some aspects of your mental skills. You may have experienced problems in the past or simply feel that, for some reason, you are not doing as well as you'd like to. Research indicates that most people use a very small percentage of their full mental capacity, so we all have plenty of room for improvement!

Wouldn't it be wonderful to be able to remember, for example:

- The key points of a presentation without having to refer to notes?, or
- The main themes of a book you have read or film you have seen?, or
- Names of all your customers or of people you meet at a conference or party?

The principles of memory

Memory enhancing techniques have been used since the earliest times. Until reading and writing were widespread, people remembered long stories, sagas, genealogical tables, names, trade routes and much more that we would find daunting today.

The Ancient Greeks realised that to remember well, you have to use every aspect of your mind – your powers of logic, imagination and association. All the following qualities help to make things more memorable and are used in many classic memory techniques.

- Sensuality
- Movement
- Association
- Sexual interest
- Humour
- Imagination
- Number
- Goals

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- Symbols
- Colours
- Order
- Positiveness
- Exaggeration.

The ideas that make up SMASHING SCOPE will always help you think of ways to improve your memory. Here are two examples of the classic memory systems.

Number/shape system

In the number shape system all you have to do is memorise images for each of the numbers from one to ten – the best system is one that you create for yourself rather than one is supplied for you.

Here are some examples:

1. Paintbrush, candle
2. Swan, duck
3. Heart, molehills
4. Yacht, chair
5. Hook, drum-kit

..... and so on.

Once you have committed these images to memory, you have a device for remembering any ten items in any order. All you have to do is to form a unique mental picture that links the items you want to remember with the number shapes. It is vital to use SMASHINGSCOPE, especially exaggeration, colour and movement, and the more imaginative you can be the better.

For example if you want to remember a shopping list, you might imagine an enormous paintbrush drawing a large loaf of bread, a beautiful swan swimming on a lake of bright yellow melted butter and velvety mushrooms sprouting from molehills on a vast green lawn.

Memory palace (sometimes called ‘Favourite Place’)

The principle of this system is to remember information by locating images around a mental layout that you already know. The system works well because it makes use of the connection in the human mind between memory and place.

- 1 Pick a place you know well. You could choose a building, a golf course, a street, a walk, a car journey or a whole town – but it’s best to start with something simple.

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- 2 Divide the place into ten separate areas (it helps to sketch out a plan on a piece of paper). The areas could be the door, the fireplace, the window, the picture, the armchair, the table and so on.
- 3 Decide on a 'route' from one place to the next. If you are in a room you will be looking at the ten places one by one, always in the same order. If you are in a building or a town, you will be mentally walking around those places.
- 4 Test yourself by visiting the places in random order and in reverse order. This should not be difficult.
- 5 Now put your route to use to remember many different types of information. Form a powerful, unique mental image that links the items you want to remember with the places in your memory palace. The more imaginative you can be the better.

Mind Maps

A Mind Map is a tool for thinking, analysing, planning and remembering efficiently. This graphic technique provides a key to unlocking the enormous potential of the brain. It harnesses the full range of skills described above - word, image, number, logic, rhythm, colour and spatial awareness and gives users the freedom to develop their skills and build on their natural abilities.

Mind Mapping developed as a result of Tony Buzan's extensive research into areas such as psychology, the neuro-physiology of the brain, science, the memory, mnemonics and creative thinking. He soon came to realise that lengthy written notes can actually act as a barrier to learning. What was needed was a technique that actually mirrors the way that the brain stores and retrieves information.

By studying the art and science of Mind Mapping you will become more confident in your own ability to develop the skills of learning and remembering. This will in turn help you to think more clearly and more creatively and your performance will start to live up to your true potential.

The importance of review

Review is vital for memory because otherwise you are spending a lot of time collecting information and then allowing it to fade away. You will find it impossible to build up a solid basis of knowledge because you constantly have to put the same items into your brain over and over again. It becomes difficult to move on, to acquire new information and to use what you already know creatively.

If, on the other hand, you do invest time in reviewing things that are important to you, you will create a rich store of facts, concepts, ideas and theories which you can draw on and add to as and when you need them. You will find that, the more you know, the easier it is to secure new knowledge.

Learn and remember efficiently

There are really three stages: first you have to acquire information, then retain it and – finally – retrieve it.

- To acquire information: pay attention, be alert, be interested and build on what you already know.
- To retain information: make connections or patterns and use your imagination. Make strong memory tracks by creating unusual, colourful pictures and associations that make you laugh or stimulate your emotions. Revisit these pictures as often as possible to ensure that they lodge in your long term memory.
- To retrieve the information: relax and allow your brain to find the picture or association that will trigger the memory.

Never forget that as far as your memory is concerned, you have to use it or lose it. So have fun and learn as much as you can. The more effort you put into memorising – the more you will remember.

Want to find out more about how to develop a powerful memory and make it a powerful tool for achieving your goals? Go to www.word-smiths.co.uk/buy.html to view/download a brochure on Word Smiths' audio book ***Memory and Learning for Success*** and find out how and where to buy.