

How to Improve Your Memory With 11 Great Mind Tricks

Written by Michelle Vartan on 05 April, 2018

The best way to strengthen memory is to use it! Here are 12 memory-improving tips to incorporate into your daily routine.

The memory works in strange and mysterious ways, but one thing is for certain: When you are unable to remember something, it's really frustrating. Starting as early as your twenties and then accelerating in decline after the age of 65, memory function slows down as we get older. Like a computer, the memory works like an entire processing system, not limited to one place in the brain (though the hippocampus is essential for memory). Over time, that processing system can experience glitches — commonly known as memory lapses.

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Memory expert [Linda Ercoli, Ph.D.](#), works in neuropsychology at the University of California, Los Angeles, Semel Institute, and has been caring for dementia patients for more than 20 years. She says as your brain ages it experiences cell-matter loss, which is what helps with connectivity throughout the brain so you can recall information. To protect those cells you must stay cognitively stimulated, she says. "The best way to strengthen the memory is to use it, consciously, as much as possible." Using her expertise, here are 12 memory-improving tips to incorporate into your daily routine. Practice these enough and soon you will finally be able to log in to your online banking account on the first try!

1. Grouping

Otherwise known as "chunking" or "categorizing," grouping is a clever way to remember your grocery or to-do lists. You can group related items by giving them each a category. For example,



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you can make sure you remember to get eggs, milk and cheese by listing them under "dairy" either on paper or in your mind. The tactic allows the items under each category to become part of a code. That way you're not working so hard to remember each item — just the few categories.

2. Make Up a Story

Similar to grouping, stories are easier to remember because they contain specific events that take place on a timeline. Say, for instance, you turned left from Washington Street onto First Street. When memorizing these directions, think: "Washington left the White House as the first president."

Read more: [The 8 Activities That Have the Most Benefit for Your Brain](#)

3. Visualize and Associate

Associating a person, place or thing with another person, place or thing gives the information significance and, therefore, your brain can recall it more easily. For example, make an association when remembering a new acquaintance. You just met a Frank who is wearing a bright blue shirt, and perhaps your Uncle Frank is really into the Blue Man Group.

Picture the two of them as the Frank twins dressed entirely in blue. Now new Frank and old Frank are associated, and your new acquaintance's name is etched in your memory. Read more:

4. Listen, Think and Write It Down

Can't recall a single slide from your boss' presentation this morning? Ercoli recommends taking notes, but in a strategic way. When someone is speaking, watch and listen (your sense organs pick up sound, so you are already taking notes by listening).

Take a moment to reflect on the information, and then write down only the main points so that you're producing a shorthand version of what you understood. "You can process that one piece of information in all those different ways," she says.

Read more: [8 Ways to Keep Your Brain Sharp as You Age](#)

5. Make It Funny and Make It Meaningful

Cognitive stimulation throughout life is vital for memory — meaning, you're more likely to remember information that means something to you personally or makes you laugh. Start making information funny or creative. Take Frank again: You just met him, and he has a long nose. So picture him with a frank for a nose.

Ercoli says it doesn't even have to make sense. "The hippocampus [part of the brain essential for memory] really likes novelty." Forget your PIN code much? Remember numbers by making

them meaningful. Take the number 2152: Think of the legal drinking age and a deck of cards.

6. Learn a New Skill Already

There are two types of memory: verbal (conscious learning) and motor (muscle memory). By enhancing your motor memory, such as by learning a new instrument, new connections are formed in the brain, and chemical and physical stimulation ensues. Ercoli (who learned to play the mandolin after the age of 50) recommends crocheting to strengthen motor memory.

Read More: [Your Sugar Habit Could Literally Be Damaging Your Brain](#)

7. Play a Video Game

Finally, you can defend your hours of game time to your nagging partner. While brain games are becoming popular and recommended for mnemonic exercise (e.g., Lumosity), a 2015 study by [Computers & Education](#) showed that playing video games has as much of a positive effect on memory. Action video games are especially beneficial because they require players to make quick decisions and track of a lot of information at once.

8. Follow the 24-Hour Rule

Most forgetting happens within the first 24 hours of learning, so if you want to remember something new re-expose yourself to that information within 24 hours. Read over your written notes or even just mentally review the people you met that day before you fall asleep.

Read More: [How to Clear Your Mental Clutter in 10 Minutes or Less](#)

9. Stop Multitasking

If you want the most efficient memory, distractions are definitely not going to get you there. Multitasking is, unfortunately, divided attention.

Our brains only have so much bandwidth, and the more tasks we do at once, the less we do those tasks well, says Ercoli. "You may blame yourself for having a poor memory, but much of the time it's a capacity issue." Make a habit of closing your laptop during a meeting, or turn off the TV when on a call with your BFF.

10. Use Acronyms

Acronyms are a great strategy for remembering ordered information. It can be a real or nonsense word, you just need to pronounce it. To form an acronym, write the facts and underline the first letter of each fact. For example, to memorize the names of your new clients Paul, Leah, Anna 'n' Tom, just think "PLANT."

11. Sing Along

There is a reason why we can't get those pesky commercial jingles to stop playing in our heads — they just stick. History has shown that information set to music or poetry is the easiest to remember (like your ABCs). When memorizing data or a list, set those words to a song you know well. No one has to know that "Mary Had a Little Lamb" is playing in your head.

Oh, and for those of you who doubt your ability to acquire new brain-stimulating habits, Ercoli has a message: "Whoever said you can't teach an old dog new tricks was wrong. You can."

What Do YOU Think?

What helps you remember things and improve your memory? Have you ever tried any of these mind tricks? Tell us about your experience in the comments!