

Help Your Memory Work Smarter, Not Harder

How many times have you taken a test and wished you could remember more of what you studied? We all struggle sometimes with faulty memories and overloaded brains. But it IS possible to remember more of what you study—and improve your school success!



Memory works in different ways. When you need a few items at the store, you may not write them down. You can remember long enough to get the things you need! But a week later, you probably won't remember everything you bought. Your shopping list was in your **working memory**. Your brain stored that information for a short time—just long enough to use it.

Now think about a favorite song from your playlist. It's much longer than the shopping list—but you probably know every word by heart! Why? It's easier to remember song lyrics than shopping lists—or the information you need for tomorrow's history test—for many reasons. The same principles will help you master knowledge for school, and move it into your long-term memory to use it in life.



Over and Over

You listen to your favorite songs over and over again. **Repetition** moves the lyrics into your brain! The more often you go over something you need to learn, the more likely you are to remember it.

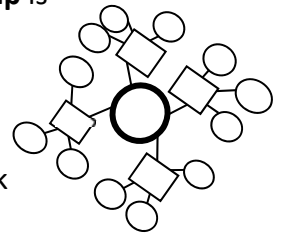
Yet reading a paragraph over and over may not help—it's boring, so your brain might go into sleep mode. You want to repeat the material in different formats, spaced out in time, and use it in various ways. What are some fun ways to repeat what you learn and move it to your long-term memory?

The Power of Pictures

You probably watch video clips of your favorite songs. Seeing a mental picture or mind movie helps wake up your memory to recall the words that match it. This is why graphic organizers are such a great way to study. And guess what—you can make your own!

To remember events from a history lesson, put them in order on a **timeline** or **sequence chart**. Or, use a **cause-and-effect chart** to show how one event leads to another. A **mind map** is another good way to show relationships between ideas, events, or people.

Drawing pictures—even stick figures—also helps put your visual memory to work. Tiny sketches will help you learn new vocabulary terms. If you need to learn the body parts of an insect for science class, copy or trace a picture from your textbook and label the parts.



Say the Words



Rhythm, melody, and rhyme—these are some features you may enjoy in the songs on your playlist. Those sound clues play a big role in making songs memorable, especially if you like to sing along! You can put the same features to work to remember things you study.

Always **talk to yourself** when you study, even softly, under your breath. When words come out of your mouth, they trace new paths that stay in your memory for a long time. This is especially true if you come back to say them again and again, taking breaks in between.

Mnemonics are special techniques to help you remember. To learn an ordered list, you can make up a sentence using words that begin with the same letters. Maybe you have to learn the first six American presidents: Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, and Adams. A sentence like this one: **Why Are Jugglers Munching Magic Apples?**—helps you remember where each president fits in the list. Make up sentences like this to learn names of planets, countries, or steps in math.

Rhymes and **songs** are also great memory aids. Maybe in elementary school you learned “Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November...” to learn which months are shorter than others. Create your own songs, poems, or raps to move new knowledge into your long-term memory.

Finally, if you have a **study buddy**, question each other on material you’re learning. Talking with a friend and putting information into words helps make it stick in your brain.



Get Moving!

Do you ever dance along while you listen to your tunes? Those moves also help you remember the song lyrics. Getting your body involved is another way to create strong memory paths.



Start by moving your hands. Writing things down by hand strengthens your memory better than typing on a device. This happens when you create graphic organizers and draw what you study. And studies suggest that creating flash cards by hand—and reviewing them regularly—is a better way to study than using an online app!

What are some other ways to learn by doing? Study partners or a study group can create a short skit to act out an important event they’re learning about in history, or a crucial scene from a novel. Even if you study by yourself, you can act out a scene in front of a mirror. You can represent a scientific model—such as the structure of a cell—using small household items.



Make It Personal



You also remember songs because they have special meaning for you. People remember things that touch their own lives. As you study, make personal connections with the topic. Did an event in history affect people in your family? Could new nutrition facts help you make wiser choices? Do you relate to the characters’ experience in a novel or play? Thinking about things like this will make new knowledge meaningful—and memorable.

When you move information into your long-term memory, it becomes available so that you can use it both now and in the future. It will help you succeed not just on tests, but in life. Strategies that use ALL your senses—sight, sound, touch, and even your feelings—can make long-term learning work for you.