An Introduction to Memorization Strategies

The majority of memory strategies are about memorization, the active of process of trying to learn and retain information. Memorization strategies go back to Greek and Roman times, but also include techniques from many other civilizations. The so called mnemonic strategies are generally easy to learn and extremely effective. Memorization strategies are helpful in learning math facts, science formulas, dates in history, vocabulary, foreign languages, lists, etc. Although I will introduce some basic concepts, I would encourage you to consult the books and internet references in our bibliography to learn more.

Most memorization strategies work by enhancing storage and retrieval. You can, for example, regroup or chunk information so that there is actually less to remember. Four items in a shopping list become just one when you convert bread, cheese, butter and tape into a tape wrapped grilled cheese sandwich. Four numbers on a keypad become one when they are a date in history or from a familiar address. When you regroup spelling lists into word families or according to spelling rules, they are easier to learn. When you convert numbers into objects or rhymes (two becomes shoe or the shape of the neck of a swan) they are easier to learn. (There are advanced memory systems that convert numbers into letters so that a six number series becomes a single word.)

Other strategies use rhyme and imagery. You can learn that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence by imagining Jefferson wearing Depends diapers. Intensifying the image with color, distortion, humor, etc. makes it even easier to remember. Thomas Jefferson is now wearing a red, white and blue diaper that he takes off when he is finished writing. You can learn that zapatos is Spanish for shoes by imagining lightening bolts zapping your toes. You can remember words spelled with ee vs. ea with two easily imagined sentences, “I feel the steel fishing reel against my heel” vs. “Never steal a real meal deal from McDonalds. “)

Convert rote information into something more meaningful and it is easier to remember. This is particularly important for children with learning disabilities who often struggle with aspects of rote memory. It may be easier to remember that 8x8=64 with the more meaningful rhyme, “I ate and I ate and got sick on the floor.” Add a humorous picture of a child getting sick on the floor and the fact is even easier to recall. We have in fact developed a math fact program called Memory Multipliers that uses rhymes and cartoons (verbal and visual) to make memorization easier.

Some strategies facilitate recall. The acronym HOMES helps you recall the names of the Great Lakes while SMART helps you remember that goals should be *specific, measurable, actionable, relevant and time* referenced. As memorization skills improve you can develop your own stories, poems or songs to help store and retrieve information. You can also use AI programs to develop them for you.

Perhaps the most powerful strategy is known as the Roman Room or Memory Palace. In this technique you use imagery to link or peg information to something very familiar to you such as rooms of your house. Take a mental walk through your home and it will trigger your memory.

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Learn the names of our presidents by imagining washing your hands at the front, slipping on *Adams* peanut butter on the entry way floor, quietly walking past the *chef's son* sleeping in the living room and covering you ears because a *mad son* not wanting to eat his dinner in the dining room. You are now well on your way to learning the names of the presidents. Take a few strolls through your house and the names will be much easier to remember than reading a list over and over. A shopping list is easier to recall when imagining the front door is made of sticky cheese, the entry way has sticky tape on the floor, the living room couch is covered with cooking oil and the dining room table is a loaf of bread.

Parents and educators understandably question whether there is value in memorizing information that is readily available through the internet. Why remember something when you can ask Alexa? While technology necessitates that we reevaluate school curriculum, having foundational knowledge makes advance learning easier. One could argue that it is no longer as important to learn the steps of long division or how to calculate square roots, but research shows that knowing math facts makes higher order math reasoning easier.

In my experience, children taught mnemonic strategies are more effective learners. When memorization comes more easily, children have more confidence in their memory. This is particularly important for ADHD children and students with learning disabilities who have been told, or otherwise believe, that their memories are poor. When they can use imagery to learn a state capitol faster and easier than their peers their self-concept improves. Memorization strategies can be taught at home and learned as a family through games and real life activities, even if they are not taught in school. If you want them to work, you must practice and use them.

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