

Learning Skills Services Student Development Centre

Room 4100 WSS | 519 661 2183 | learning@uwo.ca | www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning



Effective Memory Strategies

Monitor Your Comprehension:

You can only remember and fully use ideas that you understand. Find ways to monitor your comprehension. Get in the habit of saying to yourself, "*Do I understand this?*" Always check the logic behind the ideas (i.e., do things happen in a way that you would predict?). If you can see the logic in something, you are much more likely to be able to reconstruct that idea even if you cannot immediately recall it. Also, look out for anything that seems counter-intuitive to you; you are less likely to remember something that does not seem logical or is something that you would not agree with. Evaluate your own comprehension by bouncing your thoughts about a course against those of other students. Tutor another student who is having difficulty; if you teach someone else, you reinforce your own knowledge.

Generate Your Own Examples:

Go beyond examples provided in class and in the textbook, and bring your general knowledge and experiences into play by relating them to academic ideas. In kinesiology, for example, relate your ability to throw a ball to the physical forces you study in class; in biology, relate photosynthesis to that poor potted plant that struggles in your basement; in sociology, relate symbolic interaction to values that you learned from your parents; in geography, relate the Canadian Shield to your trip to Algonquin Park; in chemistry, relate acids to home uses of vinegar; in physics, relate acceleration to riding your bike. When you can generate your own examples, you demonstrate your understanding, and your memory is enhanced.

Think In Pictures, Colours, and Shapes:

Concrete images are more memorable than abstract ideas, and that is why pictures are such important instructional aids for your instructors and text authors. Practice colourful thinking! Associate your own mental pictures to the academic content. In your class and text notes use colour to highlight headings and other key ideas. Use shapes to help you organise ideas; triangles, boxes, flow charts, circles.

Use Mnemonics:

Mnemonics are memory training devices or ways of making associations to aid in remembering. They can be extremely powerful; at the same time, if you overuse mnemonics, you can spend too much time on generating and learning the mnemonics and too little time on real understanding of the material. The economical use of



Learning Skills Services – Student Development Centre
Western Student Services Building, Suite 4100
Western University
1151 Richmond St, London, ON N6A 3K7



mnemonics to study for a test can be very effective. There are many types of mnemonics and, no doubt, you will have used some of them.

- **Rhymes** can be powerful; psychology students will recognize Freud's personality theory in the little rhyme, "Id is the kid!"
- **Acronyms** collapse the beginning letters of a set of information into one or a few words; in trigonometry, you can use SOHCAHTOA for right-angled triangles; in French you can use DR and MRS VANDERTRAMPP for verbs that conjugate with être.
- The **beginning letters** of a set of information can be built into a sentence; for biology, you might recognize **Kings Play Chess On Frosted Glass Surfaces**.

These are just a few of the many types of mnemonics that you can use. As you study for your tests, use your imagination to generate fitting mnemonics for some of the key information in your courses.

Repetition:

The more times you go over something, the better your memory will be of that information. However, each time you go through something, try to use a different method so that you are not just repeating exactly the same activity. By varying your approach you will create more connections in long-term memory.