

Dale S. Sherman, Ph.D.

Strategies for Enhancing Memory

Definition:

Memory is the ability to store information, hold onto it, then, retrieve that information at a future date. The cognitive ability to store information, sometimes referred to as *long-term memory*, includes our explicit knowledge, recollection of historic events (time and place), storage of facts, as well as other types of memory processes known as implicit, procedural, and prospective memory. There are various strategies we can use to enhance memory; some focus on storage and new learning (encoding), while others attempt to increase our ability to recall previously stored material (decoding).

General Tips:

- 1) PAY ATTENTION – Focus on what you need to remember. Maybe, it's not your memory's fault!
- 2) Practice without guessing – If you guess incorrectly and repeat using the wrong information, you will start to learn the wrong stuff. Verify and keep track of your progress. Check in with others.
- 3) As-It-Happens – Use these strategies as things happen. Don't wait to write important information down.
- 4) Normal aging – Remember memory may decline with age.

Strategies to Enhance Storage and Learning:

- 1) Repetition & Practice – Repeat what you need to recall over and over in frequent intervals (i.e. 1x /15 min v. 1x /60 min). Use paper and pencil, flash cards, or draw an image. If it is a physical activity or includes physical action (i.e. computer), do the task over and over.
- 2) Simplify – Reduce the amount of information and go over it frequently.
- 3) Visualization – See the information in your mind, or, create a visual association.
- 4) Association – Tie what you want to remember to familiar things you know well.
- 5) Mnemonics – Create a story or phrase with the letters of what you need to learn. Use what you're inclined to remember using familiar or bizarre associations. Use rhymes or tunes.
- 6) 'Chunking' – Divide the information into bite-size portions. Group like things together. A good example is phone numbers . . . (310) 423-9722. Use groupings of 4 or less.
- 7) Write it down – Actively write down what you need to recall. Don't ask someone else to do it!
- 8) Understanding and detail – Go beyond. Find out more information about how items you need to learn are related. This will help you develop associations and gain a 'bigger picture'.

Strategies to Enhance Recall:

- 1) Contextual learning/recall – Recall information under the same conditions you learned it.
- 2) Structure – Develop a system for routine things you will need to learn then follow it. For example: Always put the car keys in the same place.
- 3) Set limits – Create a time limit to recall the information, then, go over it until you can correctly recall it 10 times without assistance. Refresh as often as necessary.
- 4) Decrease stress and anxiety – This may lead to self-doubt, hesitation, then, use of poor memory strategies (i.e. guessing) which will lead to further problems with anxiety and poor memory.

Use of Aids:

- 1) Paper-and-pencil, computer, PDA. This greatly increases the amount you can manage.
- 2) Use what-ever-it-takes: Post-its, calendars, journals, day planners, log books, chalk board, refrigerator clips, timers, etc.
- 3) Flash cards – This greatly enhances new learning and storage. Keep your flash cards for a refresher when you need it.