Effective Memory Strategies

Much of this information was obtained from: http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/learning/memory.html and then added to/edited/adapted/enhanced by Marni Jones for Dickinson College students

Structuring Information is an important strategy to remember information. Using tools like chunking, mnemonics, acronyms, acrostics, loci, image-name connections, and chaining can solidify information in your memory better than simple repetition will.

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 concept or lesson 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 a relating to a lesson in **Biology**, relate photosynthesis to that poor potted plant that struggled in your basement; in **Sociology**, relate symbolic interaction to values that you learned from your parents; in **Geography**, relate an unfamiliar isthmus to that ocean/bay formation where you went to the beach; in **Chemistry**, relate reactions of compounds to what happens when cooking ingredients are combined; 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, Colors, 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 colorful thinking! Associate your own mental pictures to the academic content. In your class and text notes use color to highlight headings and other key ideas. Use shapes to help you organize ideas; triangles, boxes, flow charts, circles.

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.

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 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. Most will recognize ROYGBIV as representing the order of the colors in the rainbow, and PEMDOS, for the order of operations in Math.

- The **beginning letters** of a set of information can be built into a sentence (called an **Acrostic**), such that PEMDOS becomes "**P**lease **E**xcuse **M**y **D**ear **A**unt **S**ally." This is particularly useful for a list of items that you need to recall in a specific order.

  So in Biology, for the taxonomy order of:

Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species

  …could be remembered by:

"**K**ings **P**lay **C**hess **O**n **F**rosted **G**lass **S**urfaces" or maybe "King Philip Came Over For Good Spaghetti" as well as "Kangaroos Playing Chicken on Freeways Get Smashed" or even "Kids Prefer Cheese Over Fried Green Spinach.

  The sky's the limit. Just remember that <u>the more outlandish or image-laden the mnemonic you create, the better you'll be able to recall it.</u>

- Words in **Foreign Languages** can be more easily recalled by creating an image of the translation of that word. For example, the word for "rice" in Spanish is "*arroz*." That sounds like "arrows," so you could remember that word by drawing this –>
  Have fun making flashcards with associative drawings on one side and the vocabulary on the other.

The Bottom Line: Engage with what you're trying to remember in <u>multiple imaginative ways over multiple times</u> so that you're generating <u>connections and associations</u> and you'll be much better equipped to remember that information when you need to.