

Mnemonics



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Mnemonics are Necessary: A Review of Memory and Learning Aids Torrey Price American Military University 26 June 2009 Mnemonics are Necessary: A Review of Memory and Learning Aids We learn many different things during childhood and even before then. Our brain has the capacity for learning to the degree we do not know which means that our learning capabilities are endless and we can only limit ourselves with the amounts of information there is to know in a lifetime.

However, how do we get to the point that we can learn so much? What means or ways are there that we can learn to expand the capacity of our minds? What good would it be to know all of this information if we cannot access it at any point that we want? One way to improve the way you learn and remember is a system called mnemonics. It is an aid or in some cases, are strategies that can increase recalling 10-fold (Patten, 1990). We may already use this system and not be aware.

Can you recall learning the words to your favorite song as a teen? Maybe you interpreted what the artist was saying and you might have put in your own words, then someone comes along and tells you the real lyrics. You may learn the new lyrics but that song may be forever associated with the lyrics you came up with. Or when learning the colors of the spectrum, you may have been taught to remember them by giving them the mnemonic Roy G. Biv: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet (Coon, 2006).

Mnemonic techniques are ways to remember what you need to know by a way of association, giving them meaning or even visualizing making it as vivid or ridiculous as possible. Mnemonic techniques are also ways to avoid

rote learning, the more common, habitual and fixed way of learning by simple repetition (Coon, 2006). The word mnemonic is derived from the Ancient Greek word mnemonikos and is related to Mnemosyne, the name of the goddess of memory in Greek mythology. Both of these words refer back to mnema or remembrance.

Now you may not remember her name or what set mythology she is from but allow me to put it this way. Mnemosyne had a love affair with the highest of the gods in Greek mythology. The affair lasted nine days and nine nights and as a result of that affair Mnemosyne gave birth to nine children- the nine muses (Svantesson, 2004). A myth is said to be knowledge in disguise because a story is more easily remembered than raw facts. Mnemonics in ancient times can be considered the basis of what is today known as the art of Memory.

Try to imagine a time before the widespread use of paper and pens, where the only means for a society to pass on lessons and teaching were by memory. The Romans and Greeks were a society like this and mnemonics were one of the most important subjects taught in school (Patten, 1990). Mnemonics are not a neat trick to show off to your friends at a party but a skill that is designed to enhance the way you remember a subject. Paying attention is of the up most importance when practicing your techniques and that attention cannot be divided (Turkington, 2003).

It is important to know that even though it may seem like you are paying attention, the brain does take an amount of resource to adhere to your surroundings, for instance, you are in an auditorium listening to President

talk about carrots and suddenly somebody behind you rips one or somebody is talking on the phone. Although paying attention is only a part of it, actually knowing the techniques will help you to learning the information you need. There are many techniques you can use to learn a myriad of things such as numbers, speeches and even languages.

Association was one of the ways mentioned before, and by associate certain words with others we create cues to help us remember those words (Patten, 1990). The use of Acronyms to remember a phrase or group of words is very easy and very common, for example, the acronym NATO stands for North Atlantic Treaty Organization or to remember the Great Lakes we use the Acronym HOMES (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior). Acrostics are a way of using first letter cueing to remember a certain phrase, whereby we take the first word of each bit of information we want to learn and turn it into the first word of a sentence (Turkington, 2003).

For example, to remember the six New England states in descending order (Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut) we could make the sentence: Martha Never Had Many Red Cars. Popular sayings can also help you to remember such as righty tighty, lefty loosey can help you to remember which way the common screw or nut and bolt turns and spring forward, fall back can remind you how to set our clock during daylight savings time.

Visualization is also a great way to memorize information; it helps a lot with language learning. A good imagination will greatly enhance the chance of you being able to remember. An example of this can be “carte” which is the

Spanish word for letter. If you can imagine a shopping cart full of mail, that can cue you to that word's meaning. In conclusion, Mnemonics has shown to be a very useful tool when it comes to learning what it is we need to be learned. The more we practice these techniques the better we become at learning.

Mnemonic techniques are based on association and should be exaggerated in size, number, and color, absurd, moving, sexual, sensual, ridiculous, unusual and unexpected. We tend to remember things that are out of the ordinary or that are utterly ridiculous. These tools are a great learning multiplier and should be taught in every classroom. I believe this system will replace the current phonics system that is widely used today, which is a way of getting back to basics, seeing as though this system has been in place for centuries.

So the next time you have the opportunity to teach a child to say their alphabets, tie their shoes or even learn another language, remember this system and you can't go wrong. References Coon, D. (2006). Psychology: A Modular Approach to Mind and Behavior, Tenth Edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson Higher Education. Patten, B. (1990). The History of Memory Arts. Neurology, 40, 346-352 Svantesson, I. (2004). Learning Maps and Memory Skills, Revised Second Edition. London: Kogan Page Limited. Turkington, C. (2003). Memory: A Self-teaching Guide. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.