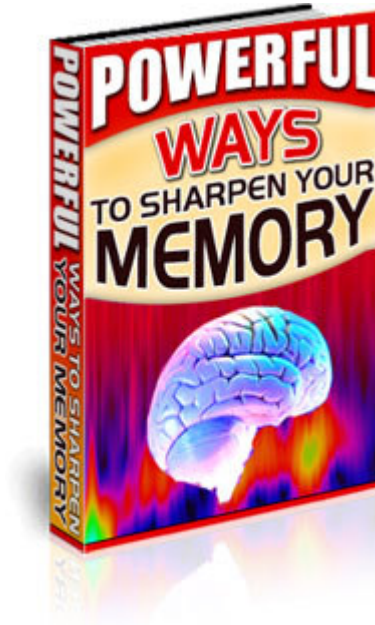


Powerful Ways to Sharpen Your Memory



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Introduction

A good memory is truly important for anyone to possess. Your memory of faces, names, facts, information, dates, events, circumstances and other things concerning your everyday life is the measure of your ability to prevail in today's fast-paced, information-dependent society. With a good memory, you don't have to fear forgetting/misplacing important stuffs and you can overcome mental barriers that hinder you from achieving success in your career, love life, and personal life.

Your memory is composed of complicated neural connections in your brain which are believed to be capable of holding millions of data. The ability of your mind to retain past experiences in a highly organized manner gives you the potential to learn and create different ideas. Your experiences are the stepping stones to greater accomplishments and at the same time your guides and protectors from danger. If your memory serves you well in this respect, you are saved the agony of repeating the mistakes of the past. By remembering crucial lessons and circumstances, you avoid the mistakes and failures made by other people.

Unless you have an illness or handicap, a poor memory is often attributed to lack of attention or concentration, insufficient listening skills, and other inherent bad habits; however, it can be honed and developed using the right methods.

Many people believe that their memory gets worse as they get older. This is true only for those who do not use their memory properly. Memory is like a muscle - the more it is used, the better it gets. The more it is neglected, the

worse it gets. This is the reason why older people have more trouble remembering than younger ones. However, people increasing in age can overcome this dilemma and can even further improve their memory by continuing their education, by refining their minds, by keeping themselves open to new experiences, and by keeping their imagination working. An important thing to realize is that different people have various ways of learning. The way in which people learn is often a factor determining the subjects they choose to study, instructors they relate to, and careers they select.

Memorization or retention of data operates by loading images, sounds, taste, smell, and sensation (touch) in a very organized and meaningful combination in our brain. There are three types of memory.

Sensory Memory is where temporary information is briefly recorded. Images such as a picture in a magazine and the design on your customer's clothing are momentarily stored in the sensory memory. It will be quickly replaced by another sensory memory unless you do something to retain it.

Short-term Memory, characterized by 20 to 30 seconds of retention, involves a limited amount of information, and is necessary in traditional processing of experiences and ordinary data gathering (everyday sensation and perception). For example, you were taught by your professor some great techniques on how to easily solve complicated Math problems. The next time you take a Math exam, you may possibly remember some of the formulas, but it's doubtful you'll be able to recall and apply all the methods being taught.

Long-term Memory involves consolidation and organization of complex knowledge and information for further reference and other cognitive (mental) processing such as the application of learning or information into meaningful experiences. Examples would include your birthday, your father's name, and your home's appearance.

Short-term and **long-term memories** are concerned with how you continually organize data that are stored in your brain. In short, human memory is like a vast and complicated yet organized library, rather than a trash can or disordered store room.

In order for you to further develop your memory capacity in various tasks, it would be helpful if you consider points and ideas in improving your memory. This would make your retention practices more efficient and sharper.

Chapter One

Sharp Memory Factors

If someone was to read a list of words to you, it's most unlikely that you will remember all the words in the list. You'll be able to recall most of the words at the beginning, some at the middle, and a few at the end. These effects are known as primacy (words at the beginning) and recency (words at the end).

The only way that a normal person can effectively recall all of the words in the list, is if he applies a mnemonic technique to help him remember. You'll also find that it's easier to recall a word if it's repeated several times in the list, or if it's related to the other words in any way, or if it stands out among the other words (for example, the word "ruby" will stand out from a list of vegetables).

To take advantage of your primacy and recency, you must find a middle ground. If you are doing something that requires a lot of thinking and you do this non-stop for hours, you'll find that the dip in the recall between the primacy and recency can be quite considerable.

If, on the other hand, you stop to take breaks too often, your brain will not really reach its primacy because it keeps on getting interrupted. In a more practical application, instead of continuously studying or working for hours, you might want to try pausing and resting after 30-50 minutes of working, just to give your brain time to refresh itself and to maximize the time when your primacy and recency are balanced.

Contrary to popular belief, being smart is not synonymous to having a good memory or good retention. You don't have to force yourself to study and

understand more in order to improve your memory; the key is actually in your lifestyle, your attitude, your diet, and your habits.

You Are What You Eat

It is often said that your brain is probably the greediest organ in your body, and it requires a very specific type of nutrition from your diet. It shouldn't be surprising then that your diet affects how your brain performs, and it performs well with a steady supply of glucose. Before you go out of your house in the morning, it would be great if you can give your brain the fuel it needs by eating a hearty breakfast. A salad packed full of antioxidants, including beta-carotene and vitamins C and E, should also help keep your brain in tip-top condition by helping to reduce damaging free radicals (damaging molecules). As you grow older, your brain has lesser capacity to defend itself from daily threats like free radicals, inflammation, and oxidation. That's why aging people need more nutrition than younger ones.

Free radicals are like cavities to your teeth; they slowly build up if they're not cleaned out. As the brain cells grow older, they sometimes stop communicating with each other. As an effect, it slows down essential processes like thinking, short-term memory retrieval, and regenerating new cells. Therefore, anti-oxidants are essential to maintain not only good health, but a good memory as well. Good sources of anti-oxidants are:

- ***Vitamin A and beta-carotene:*** Carrots, spinach, cantaloupe, winter squash
- ***Vitamin C:*** Citrus fruits, broccoli, strawberries, tomatoes

- **Vitamin E:** Nuts, seeds, vegetable oil, wheat germ

Studies show that fatty food that causes atherosclerosis (clogging of arteries) are also the same type of food that disrupts neural activities. Cut back on the fat and replace it with foods rich in anti-oxidants. Nothing will replace a well-balanced meal, but to make sure that your body doesn't lack any of its nutritional needs, it would be a good idea to take food supplements. As the name implies, they're supplements, and not replacements.

Scientific research also indicates that eating fish can indeed sharpen your memory. Most fish fat contains the polyunsaturated fatty acid DHA, which performs a significant part in the brain development of young children. Tests show that kids who consume adequate foods containing DHA score better on IQ tests than those who take lesser amounts of DHA. Fish also contains omega-3 fatty acids which opens up new communication centers in the brain's neurons. This allows your mind to operate at its peak performance.

Another significant finding suggests that smoking can affect the ability of the brain to process information properly. Chain smokers have higher risks of impairing their visual and verbal memories. So the next time you think of smoking, remember that it's not only dangerous to your health, but you are sacrificing your memory functions as well.

Caffeine and alcohol causes anxiety and nervousness. This may hamper information from properly entering your mind because memory works best when you are relaxed and focused.

Reduce Stress

Medical researches show that people who are always anxious produce “stress hormones” like cortisol, which damages brain cells. Make it a point to do something that will relax you everyday. Try meditating, yoga, drinking tea, taking a long bath ... whatever works for you. A very effective method to reduce stress is deep breathing and visualizing the expected outcome of any situation to turn out well. Don't forget to get enough rest.

Poor memory is often a result of poor self-image. After all, it all starts and ends in the mind. So to have a healthy mind, believe that you can achieve anything you desire. Boost your self-esteem and be confident in your abilities. Your attitude should be supportive of your goals.

Cardiovascular exercises like walking improves blood circulation and are good for the heart and brain. Research also indicates that walking helps release hormones that aid in regenerating new brain cells. If you're bored with just plain walking, engage into sports that you love. Play basketball, volleyball, tennis, or anything that excites you. By exercising, you can lessen your chances of developing high blood pressure which contributes to memory loss when you get older. So get up and get moving. Not only will you be getting a fit and healthy body, but you'll also sharpen your memory and improve your creativity. Not to mention the fun and camaraderie you'll be getting with your teammates and competitors.

Just like any muscle, you also need to exercise your brain so that it doesn't deteriorate. Engage in games that will help you think. Talk to people,

read informational books, listen to educational tapes, and make it a habit to continuously learn and experience new things. Remember that when your neurons die, they don't come back to life anymore. So you better use them, or you'll lose them.

If you feel that your memory really isn't how it used to be, go and see a physician. Sometimes, memory loss can be a symptom of more serious diseases and can go undetected for years because you don't really feel anything else other than memory loss.

Music and Memory

Elderly people suffering from dementia were said to have better reasoning about their backgrounds and personal history when there was music playing in the clinical area than in silence, during an experiment conducted by Elizabeth Valentine, a psychologist at the University of London and co-author of new research on music and memory.

Increasingly, music is accompanying traditional medical therapies to help people heal faster. Experts say music has the power to calm and to energize the spirit.

The British researchers conducted a test on 23 people (ages 68 to 90) with mild dementia. The test was done with different sounds playing in the background.

While asking the questions, the researchers either played: a familiar tune (*Winter*, from Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*), novel music (*Hook*, by Fitkin), or pre-

recorded cafeteria noise - or asked the questions in stillness. Over four weeks, each person was tested in all four situations.

The participants answered more questions correctly with sound in the background rather than in silence, and they scored even better when music was playing.

“Whether the music was familiar or new did not seem to matter. The music probably aroused the participants and helped them focus,” the researchers said.

Sleep and Memory

Research indicates that you can better remember the information you are reading if you will go to sleep right after learning it. But there are two limits:

1. The material that you intend to recall should be easy to understand, or you should already have a fair amount of knowledge or experience in the topic being discussed.
2. You must not be too tired or exhausted when reading the material.

The next time you need to learn something, try this procedure and see if it works for you. It worked for me!

Learning and Emotions

As discussed earlier, emotions and feelings play a very important role in the process of learning and memory retention. Music has been said to affect learning and memory in psychologically-challenged patients. On the other hand,

internal factors such as feelings and emotions should also be considered in retrieving data or in decoding stored information in your brain.

The creation of a good mood in producing better temper, positive outlooks, or even in relaxation are very popular nowadays in creating a holistic approach in wellness and mental health. The balance between mind and body and the conditioning that happens inside your brain may affect your acquisition of knowledge and information. That is why, it is very important to have a good mood in perceiving, receiving, and retrieving emotional as well as mental information.

Here are some of the valuable tips or techniques in mood conditioning that will definitely help you improve your mental capacities.

1. Close your eyes and repeat a chant that will help you recall a picture, a scenario or a very relevant experience. You can also do this by repeating a very positive statement like: "No matter what you say or do to me, I'm still a worthwhile person!" Remembering such words can also boost confidence during exams or in periods of learning or even in daily struggles. By saying positive things regarding your life, you are increasing the chances of associating your experience with pleasant feeling, and this would help you remember more of the good things than the bad ones that could lead you down.
2. Imagine a face of someone who has put you down in some ways in the past (e.g. a family member, a teacher, a friend, or an ex lover). After getting the picture of his or her face, say, "No matter what you say or do to me, I'm still a worthwhile person!" This would relieve you and put

you into a positive consciousness in dealing with people or strangers. Mental pictures can also relieve you from the stress brought about by bad or traumatic experiences.

3. There are physical ways of improving mood or the place where learning has to take place. Scented candles, aromatic objects, or the creation of illusion of relaxation (with the use of verdant or calmed colors such as pastel, earth tones, or non-solid shades) are some of the practical ways in helping you to relax while learning or acquiring knowledge or information. In uncontrolled environments which require spontaneous reaction, it would still be best to create mental pictures (imagining the blueness and calmness of the sea, or the very refreshing scene of a green countryside) while undertaking learning tasks or actions.

Chapter Two Attention

Before you can expect to remember or memorize a thing, that thing must have been impressed clearly upon the records of your subconscious. And the main factor of the recording of impressions is that quality of the mind that we call **Attention**, which is the ability to focus and give meaning to a particular data or stimulus.

Our capability to process information is somewhat limited. Therefore, we must constantly select and decide which data are relevant and which are not. Stimuli or sensations that you perceive and organize into meaningful thoughts are selectively analyzed by your brain. If the stimuli or data is relevant or applicable for further use or access, your brain transfers this information to the long-term storage center. However, for this to happen, attention must take place

One of the most common causes of poor attention is the lack of interest. You are more inclined to remember the things in which you have been most interested, because in that emanation of interest there has been a high degree of attention exhibited. A person may have a very poor memory for many things; but when it comes to things in which his interest is involved, he often remembers the most intricate details. This is called involuntary attention. This type of attention does not require special effort or exertion because it follows upon interest, curiosity, or desire.

The other type of attention is called voluntary attention. This form of attention is granted upon objects not necessarily interesting, curious, or attractive. This requires the effort and usage of the will.

Every person has more or less involuntary attention, while only a few possess developed voluntary attention. The former is initiated by instinct, while the latter comes only by practice and training.

For attention to take place, you must diligently practice the art of voluntary attention. Here are some successful strategies to help you acquire this essential skill:

1. **Turn your attention upon some uninteresting thing and study every detail until you are able to describe them.** This will seem boring or tiresome at first but you must stick to it. Do not practice too long at a time at first; take a rest and try it again later. You will soon find that it comes easier, and that a new interest is starting to manifest itself in the task. For example, pick a flower. Touch it. Smell it. Feel its texture. How many petals does it have? How long is the stem? What is the color and shape of the petals? By doing this simple task, you will be surprised at the quantity of little things that you will notice. This method, practiced on many things, in spare hours, will develop the power of voluntary attention and perception in anyone, no matter how deficient he or she may have been in these things. Begin to take notice of things about you: the places you visit, the people in the rooms, etc. In this way you will start the habit of "noticing things," which is the first requisite for memory development.
2. **Eliminate distractions.** Even though you may have heard of multi-tasking, it is very difficult for people to do more than one thing at a

time. For example, you're a law student studying for the Bar Exams. You wouldn't be able to absorb properly into your mind what you are studying if your radio is playing loud rock-and-roll music, or if you're hearing the video games being played by your kid brother. As much as possible, avoid any possible distractions such as TV, radio, or other people chattering.

3. **Retain focus and concentration in the process of learning or memorization.** Let's say you're busy preparing for an important presentation tomorrow. A new employee was introduced to you while you are working. In this case, there would be much less chance for you to remember anything about that new employee because you are concentrating on something else which you regard as more urgent or important. If you want to remember something well, shift your focus on that one thing and willfully commit it to memory.
4. **Keep track all of your thoughts.** Whenever you become aware that your thoughts are losing, yell "STOP!" in your mind. This will bring your drifting to a halt and redirect your attention to what needs to be done. Remember that good concentration breeds good memory. If you find that your thoughts are traveling, be conscious that your attention is drifting.
5. **Get interested.** To have good memorization skills, you should also like what you are doing. To vividly memorize a visual, an image, or even text, engage yourself into it. You should put your heart in every activity

you're working and doing. If you don't like to engage in a certain activity, there's a slim chance for you to remember aspects about it. Let's say your parents want you to become an engineer, but you dream of becoming a musician. If you studied engineering because your parents forced you to, you won't have the dedication or desire to retain information from your engineering books. Don't push yourself to do something that you have no interest in. As Leonardo Da Vinci said: *"Just as eating against one's will is injurious to health, so study without a liking for it spoils the memory, and it retains nothing it takes in."*

6. **Get motivated.** Now let's say you want to become a doctor. Why are you familiarizing and memorizing into such ambiguous medical or biological terms? For one thing, you might want to be on the top of the class. Or you might want to be popular in your school. Or you might want to be a good doctor someday to help your community. Goals and timeframe nourish motivation. And motivation promotes a sharp memory. To further motivate yourself, reward yourself for any tasks that you have accomplished. Set a particular incentive for every objective. For example, treat yourself to your favorite restaurant after finishing a project. When you've accomplished a bigger task, go on a vacation. Just set something gratifying to indulge in after completing a certain undertaking. Remember: Man by nature is a go-getter. He will get whatever he aspires for. In a consumption-based and technologically-driven world, one should have a stake or goal to feed

his symbolic ego. By rewarding yourself in every success you account for, you will aspire for more and will develop interest on your activity. In the process, your interest will make you more productive and successful.

7. **Give your subconscious a mental command to bear in mind what you want to remember.** You may say, "Here, you take note of this and remember it for me!" You'll be astounded by what the subconscious can do for you.

Before you can memorize or remember anything, you should be able to perceive well through proper attention. Use the methods above and you're well on your way to a sharper memory.

Chapter Three

Basic Memory Tools

No one is born with a bad memory. Unless factors such as your lifestyle, health, or other conditions has affected it, you can sharpen your memory with the proper knowledge and practice. In this chapter, I'm going to discuss the basic concepts of memory.

Association

If you want to efficiently remember something, it is necessary that it be regarded in connection, or in association with one or more other things that you already know. The greater the number of other things with which it is associated with, the better chances you will be able to recall it.

Two popular techniques of association are acronyms and acrostics.

An acronym is an invented combination of first letters of the items to be remembered. For example: an acronym commonly used to remember the sequence of colors in the light spectrum is the name ROY G. BIV: Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, and Violet. Sometimes, the acronym can be more familiar than the complete name itself, such as RAM (Random Access Memory) or SCUBA (Self-Contained Underwater Breathing Apparatus).

On the other hand, an acrostic is an invented sentence where the first letter of each word is a cue to the thing you want to remember. For example, **Every Good Boy Deserves Fun** is an acrostic to remember the order of G-clef notes on sheet music - E, G, B, D, F. An acrostic for the nine planets of our solar system would be **My Very Eager Mother Just Sent Us Nine Peaches** (Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto).

Visualization and Imagination

Images are internal sensory representations that are also used in the creation of memory. They can bring words to mind, which can arouse other

images or pictures. The formation of images appears to help in learning and remembering what has been learned or experienced in the past.

Images and words can help you in remembering things by bringing pictures in your head instead of just words or figures. Let's say, in learning the process of cell mitosis or cell division, most of the books that contain concepts or scientific ideas have pictures to describe scenarios that are sometimes difficult to be seen by the human eye. Another example would be the structure of a bacteria or a virus. Graphic elements and visual tools, therefore, may become guiding principles in learning conceptual or precisely scientific ideas.

Another example would be...

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