

How To

# Remember What You've Learned



**I**t's the day of the big test. You studied hard last night, and as you walk into the classroom, your head is swimming with facts—all of which mush together the second you see the test. Which event drew the United States into World War II? Which side was Italy on in the war? Did Roosevelt, Stalin and Churchill meet in Malta or Yalta?

"But I knew this stuff last night," you say as you leave class. And you probably did. But if you don't use the right techniques, you won't remember what you've learned.

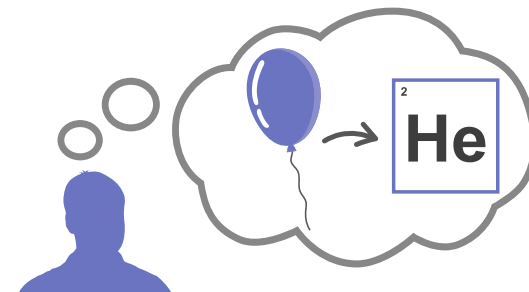
Some people remember things the first time they see them. The rest of us have to work at remembering what we've learned. Luckily, there are some techniques that will help.

## Connect what you learn to what you know

One way to remember new material is to connect it with something you already know. Your science teacher has mentioned that friction creates heat. You already know that rubbing your hands together warms them. So you won't find it **hard to remember that meteors are heated by friction with the earth's atmosphere.**



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## Use mental pictures

You can use a mental picture to help you remember facts and concepts. To remember the concept of *circumference*, for example, you might visualize the word written around the rim of a circle.

You can also use a series of mental pictures. Say you need to know the names of the noble gases in the order they appear on the periodic table. Try connecting each gas with some landmark on a trip you know very well.

Imagine your daily routine. You wake up and look at the ceiling. There's a balloon filled with *helium* floating there. Next you get dressed in your favorite *neon* colored shirt. At breakfast, you argue (*argon*) with your sister about whose turn it is to feed the cat. Holding the door open for you is Superman, who warns you to avoid kryptonite (*krypton*). As you proceed on your imaginary trip to school, you can picture similar images for each remaining gas.

# Learn how to remember facts

From the multiplication tables in math to the periodic table in chemistry, students constantly have to memorize facts. Here are some tips to make it easier:

- **Short lists** are easier to learn than long lists. It will take less time to memorize five lists of 10 items than one list of 50. Grouping items into categories also helps.
- **Start in a different place each time** when memorizing a list. Otherwise, you'll tend to remember the beginning and the end of the list better than the items in the middle.
- **Write a fact over and over** to help you memorize it. Just be sure you're spelling correctly. If you don't, you'll memorize the wrong spelling.



## Use mnemonics

A mnemonic (nih-MAH-nick) is a short (and usually silly) verbal device that helps you remember things. You probably already know some mnemonics—for instance, the famous calendar rhyme that begins, “Thirty days hath September, April, June and November.”

Another mnemonic involves creating a word or sentence in which each letter, or the first letter of each word, is the first letter of one of the things you have to remember. To remember the different steps of the scientific method, for example, you could remember HOMER: hypothesize, operationalize, measure, evaluate and replicate.

# Test yourself

Before you take the test your teacher has prepared, try giving yourself a test. If you're studying vocabulary words, ask someone to quiz you on them. Or, you could record the vocabulary words and quiz yourself.

Flash cards are another way to test yourself. Get some index cards. Write a word or term on one side and the definition on the other. Quiz yourself by looking at the definition to see if you can name the word. Then, look at the word and see if you can say the definition.

## Keep your brain engaged



Have you ever been listening to a friend tell a long story about what happened on a TV show when they stop and say “Don’t you agree?” You have no idea because you didn’t even hear the opinion. You heard your friend talking, but your brain was on autopilot. You had “tuned out.”

Research shows we learn best when we keep our brains “tuned in.” You can do that as you are listening or reading by constantly asking yourself questions. *Does that make sense? Did I already know that? Is this different from what the teacher said or from what I have read? Is there anything new or unusual here?*

As a bonus, when you keep your mind engaged and thinking, it is not only easier to remember what you’re learning, it is also likely to be interesting—and even fun.

# Use it or you’ll lose it

**A**thletes say this to themselves every day as they work out. They know they need to keep practicing even if they’ve mastered a skill.



It’s the same way with academics. Studies show that students who practice recalling what they’ve learned achieve more than students who don’t. Want to remember those vocabulary words for the final exam? Drill with your flash cards every now and then. Challenge family members at dinner—name an element and see who can tell you its symbol.



**The memory skills you learn now will make it easier to remember things throughout your school career ... and throughout your life.**

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