

## MEMORY TECHNIQUES

Your memory is the place where your mind stores and remembers information. Your brain is like a funnel of information...you must learn how to organize and filter all of the information that you are trying to remember, especially when you are in medical school.

### We have two types of memory:

- Short term memory is your working memory and it holds a limited amount of information.
- Long term memory is where the magic happens. Your long-term memory holds lots of information, like a flash drive. Information in your long-term memory consists of information you've been hearing over and over and over. It takes effort and time to store information into your long-term memory. You must review information within 24-48 hours of hearing/learning it in order to begin storing it into your long-term memory, so you should always review class notes/material within this amount of time. Reviewing is an ongoing process.

### Memory Helpers & Hindrances

There are things that can help improve your memory, and they include: proper sleep, proper diet, physical and mental exercise, positivity, environment, study breaks, and repetition/visualization.

Other things, however, can greatly hinder your memory, so you should try to avoid or manage these things as much as you are able, including distractions, like social media, alcohol and drugs, stress and close-mindedness.

### Ways to Remember Information

Remembering information seems time-consuming, but it is a necessity in this type of schooling. There are helpful strategies you can use in order to store and remember large amounts of information. Promise, you have already used some of them before getting to medical school.

1. **Self-Reflection**
  - a. Reflection should involve several cognitive activities that lead to stronger learning and remembering.
  - b. Retrieving knowledge and earlier training from memory, connecting these to new experiences, and visualizing and mentally rehearsing what you know (and what you may need more practice with).
  - c. Consider this: how do you know what you know? Can you answer questions on this material? Can you teach it to someone?
2. **VCR:** This memory technique helps you to commit info in your long-term memory and retrieve it when you need it. It stands for:
  - a. **Visualize:** Create a picture in your mind as you hear the information.
  - b. **Concentrate:** Really concentrate on the information – think hard about it.
  - c. **Relate:** Relate the information and make connections to things you already know or understand to help you eventually apply it to questions/scenarios.
  - d. **Repeat:** Repeat the information out loud to yourself or to someone else so that you can begin to transfer it to your long-term memory.
  - e. **Review:** Repetition is key to remembering something. The more you see and use the information, the easier it will be to remember it when needed.
3. **SQ3R:** This is a reading strategy and is helpful when you must read a lot of material. Here is how it works:
  - a. **Scan or Survey:** Before you read, survey the chapter, article or essay. Look at the title, headings, and subheadings; captions under pictures, charts, graphs or maps; review questions or teacher-made study guides; introductory and concluding paragraphs; summaries.
  - b. **Question while you are surveying:** Turn the title, headings, and/or subheadings into questions; read questions at the end of the chapters or after each subheading; ask yourself, "What did my instructor say about this chapter or subject when it was assigned?" Ask yourself, "What do I already know about this subject?"

- c. **Read:** Now it's time to actually start reading. During this step, look for answers to the questions you first raised; answer questions at the beginning or end of chapters or study guides; reread captions under pictures, graphs, etc., note all the underlined, italicized, bold printed words or phrases; study graphic aids; reduce your speed for difficult passages; stop and reread parts which are not clear; read only a section at a time and recite after each section.
- d. **Recite:** Orally ask yourself questions about what you have just read, or summarize, in your own words, what you read; take notes from the text, but write the information in your own words; underline or highlight important points you've just read. The more senses (seeing, hearing, saying, writing) you use during this step, the more likely you will remember it.
- e. **Review:** This is an ongoing step. You should review material for a class daily.
4. **Mnemonics:** These are devices that can assist in helping you remember something. They are also a recommended study/memory strategy for medical school students. Examples include jingles/rhymes, sentences, words, stories, and acronyms. Here are some examples:
  - a. **Sentences:** Create a sentence with the first letter of each word you must remember...think about the planets...**My Very Elderly Mother Just Sat Up Nights**  
(Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune)
  - b. **Jingles/Rhymes:** Think about commercials and songs...use information you need to study and apply it to the beat of your favorite song – think about the ABCs.
  - c. **Words:** Remember trying to remember the Great Lakes? Here is a word that helps many people remember them: HOMES = **H**uron, **O**ntario, **M**ichigan, **E**rie, **S**uperior. Even basic conjunctions can be remembered by using a word, like FANBOYS = **F**or, **A**nd, **N**or, **B**ut, **O**r **Y**et, **S**o
  - d. **Acronyms:** Acronyms are abbreviations formed by using the first letter of each word in a phrase to create a new word or a set of letters. They are not all pronounced as words – some are pronounced by saying each letter, like FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) or LOL (laugh out loud).
5. **Study Groups:** This is a great way to help you remember material. By talking about it and hearing others' thoughts on it, you will better remember it. If you can teach it, then you know it!
  - a. A successful study group consists of a maximum of four (4) people and should include people who share similar goals.
  - b. A study group should **not** include your regular social group.
  - c. Study groups should be organized and structured, so there should be a leader and there should be rules.
  - d. During your sessions, you should ask questions, compare and share. notes/ideas/understanding of material, drill and test each other, make predictions together, and brainstorm & teach each other!
  - e. Avoid distractions during a study group session; you are there to work, not talk about what is happening outside of study session.
6. **Flash Cards:** A good set of traditional flash cards includes a word/term on one side and on the other side, the definition and a picture representing that word/term. The picture will help you make associations to the term, which will help you better remember its definition. Flashcards are best for memorizing factoids and terminology.
  - a. **OR - Try Anki (<https://apps.ankiweb.net>)**, an online program that helps with remembering large chunks of information by use of digital flashcards and spaced repetition.
7. **Concept or Mind Maps:** A visual tool used to organize information starting from a single, central concept. From the central concept, branches extend outward to represent related subtopics or ideas. Check out this video that explains mind maps and provides examples. [Mind Maps - Ali Abdaal \(Skillshare class-18\) - YouTube](#)
8. **Memory or Mind Palaces:** A mind palace is a memory technique that helps you remember large amounts of information by utilizing both visual and spatial memory. The goal is to visualize a familiar place (your bedroom, your house...) and associate the information you are trying to remember with locations within that place. Check out this video on mind palaces to get more information! [Mind Palace \(Simple Guide\) - 5 Steps to Remember Things With a Memory Palace - YouTube](#)

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**Works Cited**

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