20 Memorization Techniques for College Students

Posted 1/27/14 in [**@hackcollege.com**](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/category/hackcollege-com)

While one of Dorothy Parker’s poems [famously states](http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/ballade-of-unfortunate-mammals/), “Women and elephants never forget,” when midterms and [finals sneak up](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2012/12/06/how-to-beat-finals.html), women and men alike panic and go into [cram-session mode](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2013/02/28/studying-and-the-art-of-cramming.html). However, college days and post-grad life need not suffer [memory lapse](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2013/10/08/memorization-tips-for-more-effective-study-sessions.html). The following memorization techniques for college students offer a variety of ways to help you earn the grade you want.

1. The Link Method



*Image:*[*capi\_camagua*](http://www.flickr.com/photos/capi_camagua/7689519998/)

Let’s start with the basics. The [Link Method](http://www.academictips.org/memory/link.html) requires making associations between items in a list and then placing an image with each connection to remember them. In other words, create a strong story by linking items in a list. The images and story associated with the list sets the recall.

2. The Loci Method

Next, head to ancient Rome for the [Method of Loci](http://health.howstuffworks.com/human-body/systems/nervous-system/how-to-improve-your-memory7.htm). This method involves mentally associating items in a list with familiar locations. For example, to remember a list, place the objects in your dorm or apartment, or if you’re homesick, your parents’ place.

Another form of the link method, creating a story (the more detailed, the better) and creating a clear path and interaction with the interior’s contents proves most effective. Use positive locations, and apply all the senses, adding color, smell, and texture to the locations and images.

3. The Peg System

When a specific order comes into play, the two-step [peg system](http://blog.oneclass.com/2012/01/25/top-5-memorization-techniques-you-wish-you-knew-for-exams/) is the top suggestion. First, link a number or a letter of the alphabet to a word, especially using rhymes or shapes similar to the numbers or letters for easier association. Every time you use the method, use the same list. A list might look like: 1-sun, 2-zoo, 3-bee, 4-tree, 5-jive. With that list in mind, link the words in the list to what objects need memorization. To remember the second object on the list, think of zoo, and the sentence containing ”zoo” provides the answer.

4. The Image-Name Technique

To remember names of specific individuals, focus on physical aspects of that person. This works well for history or literature courses. For example, think of listing the presidents of the United States, or pairing a person with a specific event or piece of work. Look up a picture of the person in question. Focus on a particular aspect of that person’s appearance.

[One example](http://www.studygs.net/memory/) includes associating Shirley Temple with her curly hair. Since curly and Shirley rhyme, it’s one of the easiet memorization techniques.

5. Erase-to-Remember



*Image:*[*Shawn Campbell*](http://www.flickr.com/photos/thecampbells/3005650135/)

[Willamette University](http://www.hackcollege.com/school-finder/schools/oregon/willamette-university/)‘s [Dr. John Terry](http://willamette.edu/dept/lcenter/resources/study_strategies/memorization.html) advises writing out everything that merits memorization in pencil prior to testing. Once committed concretely to memory, erase that information from the list. At the end of the exercise, your paper will be blank, and your mind full.

6. Keywords

Using keywords helps in learning vocabulary, especially if your GPA suffers from foreign language requirements. Choose a foreign word to memorize, then choose an [English](http://www.hackcollege.com/school-finder/schools/english/) (or any other base language) word that sounds similar as your keyword, and finally, create an image that pairs the keyword with the real meaning of the foreign word.

For example, the [Spanish](http://www.hackcollege.com/guides/getting-and-using-a-spanish-degree) word casa — which means house — could be associated with case, so picture a case enclosing a house.

7. Mind Maps



*Image:*[*See in Colors*](http://www.flickr.com/photos/57806312@N05/6012639844/)

Drawing mind maps easily and clearly organizes and condenses information. Working especially well for understanding chapters in a textbook, draw the main heading at the center, and use the subheadings as offshoots. Then, important details shoot off from those.

8. Chunking

This technique involves breaking down or clustering information. Take a large piece of information, and reduce it into smaller subcategories. For instance, if you needed to remember a large number, say 780,592, you’d break it into 78-05-92. You’ll retain information longer with this process, as well.

9. Acronyms

One of the simplest ways to remember processes or parts of a larger picture, use the first letter of each word to make one long acronym. Remember ROYGBIV?

10. Acrostics

An [acrostic](http://www.studygs.net/memory/memacrostic.htm) takes an acronym to the next step. Instead of simply using the first letter, an acrostic takes the first letter of each word to form a poem or sentence that points to the real words. Think elementary math or guitar lines: Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally (Parenthesis, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, and Subtraction) and Every Good Boy Does Fine (E, G, B, D, F).

11. Pythagoras Method

Remember the [Pythagorean Theorem](http://math.about.com/od/pythagorean/ss/pythag.htm)? If that’s a rusty recall, take his biographical memorization technique to practice. When a teacher begins a section, study immediately, and prior to bed, try to remember everything you went over. Add more information to your nightly review with each class. By the night before the big test, you’ll be able to recall the full material of the section.

12. Repeat

If you enjoy [study groups](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2012/03/31/use-g-hangouts-for-study-groups.html), make sure to meet right after class. By immediate repeating, reciting, and discussing that information that was just taught, you more readily solidify concepts in long-term memory. Put into practice, simple repeating can be one of the most powerful memorization techniques for college students.

Plus, people hear and understand differently, so hearing various analyses aids in fuller comprehension.

13. Spurts and Breaks



[All-nighters](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2013/03/20/helpful-advice-for-pulling-a-successful-all-nighter.html) and [library camping](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2013/09/03/why-you-shouldnt-study-for-12-hours-straight.html) doesn’t produce the best results, believe it or not. [Study breaks](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2014/01/16/10-new-netflix-movies-to-devour-during-your-next-binge-watching-spree.html), when placed within study intervals, actually better support retention. Plan one to two-hour [study sessions](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2013/11/13/6-ways-to-improve-study-sessions.html) three to four times a week.

Studying in intervals similar to class duration (such as thirty minutes, a ten minute break, and another thirty minutes) fits most students’ attention spans.

14. Morning Memorization

While reviewing before perfectly ends a productive day, use the morning and daylight, especially on weekends, for extra-strenuous study material. [Well-rested](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2012/09/14/how-to-maximize-your-sleep-schedule.html) and without the panic of a dwindling night, day hours foster memorization and productivity.

15. The Journey Method

The [Journey Method](http://www.academictips.org/memory/journey.html) combines storytelling and order techniques as used in the Peg System by using visual landmarks along a journey to convey information. For remembering lists, associate a listed item with a stop on a popular route in your daily life. For example, a subway route from school to work might apply.

16. Write and Re-write

Don’t think you can skip [taking notes](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2013/04/09/the-importance-of-taking-notes.html) in class or in meetings. Truly listen, and take notes of the speaker’s points. Test information often comes directly from lecture.

In addition, re-write or type your notes. The process of reading and rewriting re-establishes the information for not only a fresh understanding, but a more permanent effect. Plus, write notes in different areas: books, notebook, study guides, etc.

17. Motion Memorization

While knowledge in sports, music, and dance requires active learning, [statistics](http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/usafa/memory.htm) show physical movement applies to all knowledge retention. To recall information, use your hands and motions to explain and review.

For instance, while speaking in a study group, walking back-and-forth and using your hands triggers memories later of that active discussion and the information spoken. This especially proves effective for [public speaking](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2012/12/06/conquer-public-communication-fear.html) and project presentations.

18. Water Over Caffeine

Overall health highly factors into long-term memory health. [Dehydration](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2012/09/26/6-reasons-to-keep-hydrated.html) weakens the body and makes focus and energy short-lived. Since generally most don’t realize they’re dehydrated, always carry a reusable water bottle with you.

In addition, [avoid caffeine](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2009/09/22/13-caffeine-free-ways-to-get-more-energy.html), as the come-down limits study time. Sleep a full eight-hours when possible so you don’t over-rely on caffeine.

19. Drop Distractions



While a busy brain is necessary, focus on one stimuli. Social media and smartphones often make one-hour study sessions turn into all-nighters. For [better productivity](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2013/09/13/productivity-101-how-to-get-through-your-to-do-list.html) and memorization, [unplug](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2014/01/09/how-to-reclaim-your-attention-span-and-work-smarter.html) and turn-off all your distractions.

20. Combine Multiple Methods

Like the Journey Method’s style, most memory techniques work most efficiently when paired with another. Using images with songs, with an acronym, and with timed studying free of eye-wandering distractions ensures a peaceful approach to a big test.

Don’t make painful learning memories. For a full [brain boost](http://www.hackcollege.com/blog/2013/12/12/ways-to-boost-brainpower.html), use these unforgettable techniques to mold your memorization skills.