Memory improvement strategies

Mnemonics is the name for learning techniques that help your memory make associations between information.

We have learned to use memory devices since early childhood. These devices can take many forms.

Rhymes and music

Many poems, songs and games revolve around rhymes that help information recall. Example: "In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue." Applying unfamiliar information to a familiar tune may help aid retention of the new information.

Associations

Create a connection between new information and old information. Example: Sardinia is an island close to Italy. You could think of sardines on an Italian pizza in order to remember the name of the island. Linking new information to old creates a bridge for information retrieval.

Acronyms

Acronyms are new "words" made up from the first letter in a series of words. NASA is an example. The N is from National, A is from Aeronautics, S is from space, and A is from Administration. Acronyms are useful when you need to recall a list of items, details, causes or parts of a whole. The trick to using acronyms, however, is practicing the bridge, or association, between the acronym and the information.

Imagery

This memory trick is especially useful for visual learners. When reviewing the information, place an image in your mind relating to the text: a diagram, a particular graph, picture, or map. Recall the image in the picture when you review the material. Example: Imagine your body when looking at a diagram of the circulatory system and the path that blood flows from the heart to the rest of the body. You can use your body to demonstrate the flow or follow the flow on the diagram. Always review the text that accompanies these images and tie the information together with the image. Practice the association between the image and the words every time you review.

Categorizing

When a student is faced with a lengthy list to recall, it can be helpful to separate the list into smaller lists, each recognized by a common trait. Example: When trying to memorize the countries on the African continent for a geography class, the task becomes more manageable if a map of the continent of Africa is divided into three or four sections with approximately the same amount of countries in each list. It is much easier to memorize several small lists than one large one. Organization of information is the key to a large task such as this.

Creative sentences

A creative sentence is another method used to recall a list of information or classification of any group of items, such as a group of countries or a list of bones in the body. Example: Create a sentence from the first letter in the list of the classification of organisms. The list is as follows: Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus and Species. A creative sentence using the first letter of each classification would be, "The Kids Push Carts Over Falling Garbage Swiftly." Again, repetition and practice are essential to the recall and retention of information.