

7. Develop and Learn to Use Your Memory

Your memory is nature's greatest tool for saving time and energy. Virtually everything we do – from tying our shoes, to driving a car, to using words when we talk or write – is based upon memory and the ability of our minds to recall.

No one has a bad memory. In fact we all have perfect photographic memories. Our brain is much like a tape recorder which sponges up everything around it. The only thing wrong with our memories is the playback. We need to make better connections with the information in our minds to retrieve what goes in.

Here are just a few tricks I have picked up over the years which have helped me and my students.

- a. Commit things to memory only when you are well rested. Trying to memorize difficult material when you are tired is a waste of time.



This "fatigue factor" is also one of the reasons we can memorize so much more effectively when we study in short bursts rather than long blocks.

My students and I found that several short sessions were better than one long session. This was later confirmed in Tony Buzan's book, *Make the*

Most of Your Mind. In it he explains the first and last item in a series are the easiest to recall because that's when concentration is at its peak.

- b. Studies indicate that certain vitamins can improve our memory, not just a little, but quite a bit – enough to make a big difference in your grades. Eat well, and supplement your diet with these memory vitamins:

- Vitamin C protects nerve tissue. A deficiency can contribute to mental confusion.
- Vitamin B-1 (thiamine) produces energy for nerve cells in the brain.
- Vitamin B-3 (niacin) aids in concentration.
- Vitamin B-6 builds protein from amino acids. A deficiency can lead to lack of concentration.
- Vitamin B-12 (folic acid and iron) prevents anemia which can lead to difficulty in concentration.
- Lecithin and Choline are essential for memory.
- Tyrosine, an amino acid, helps long-term memory.

9. Study According to Your Biological Clock.

Determine when you study best. Some of us are early birds. Others of us are night owls. Most of us are somewhere in between. Because our "biological clocks" are all different we study and concentrate best when our temperatures are highest. So instead of fighting it, we need to take advantage of it.

Of the three types, the night person will encounter the most criticism, especially if his parents are morning types who think he is staying up way past his bedtime, or is just downright lazy when he sleeps until noon every weekend.

However, the night person isn't deliberately setting his own body temperature. He would gladly rise early if he were a morning person. And his late hours have been scientifically proven to be his most productive hours of the day. Inform your parents of this.

The early riser has fewer problems, of course, because anyone who is up and ready to go at the crack of dawn seems to be a model for the rest of us to follow. He should do his studying early in the day, when he is at his peak and ignore the night people who kid him about going to bed so early.

Of course there will be times when you can't arrange to study on your perfect schedule. If you *must* study when you're tired, try this three minute routine to restore oxygen (and zest) to your brain:

- Lift your feet up. Let the blood flow to your head.
 - Begin some deep, slow, rhythmic breathing.
 - Eat something sweet.
- Determine when you study best and take advantage of it.

As with lecture notes, a good way to check how well you understand something is to write down potential test questions about the material just read. Start by briefly summarizing to yourself the meaning of the chapter title and subtitles. Practice for the exam while studying the material.

- Use text to make up test questions.

An easy way to take notes is to draw a line down the center of a sheet. Use the left side for key points from the textbook, which you will read before class. Use the right side to add any important key points the teacher makes if you don't already have them on the left side. This text-lecture process will make class material much easier to understand and add to your retention.

After class, find a quiet place to review your notes. If you don't understand something, ask the teacher right away, or ask someone else in class to give you an explanation. Don't let unanswered questions pile up.

- Review notes immediately after class.
- If you don't understand, ask.

12. Take Worthwhile Notes.

Taking worthwhile notes is one of your critical high school survival skills. It is easy to take good notes.

To begin with, take notes with a purpose other than to just fill up a page with words. No one gives you credit for the number of words in your notebook. You only get credit for a few right words – on exams.

The purpose of note taking is to get key points from textbooks and lectures. A key point is an answer to an exam question. Every class day, your teacher is giving you about five to ten key points in the reading assignment and lecture. (Which also means missing class, for whatever reason, is like throwing away a page of valuable notes).

- Take notes with a purpose.
- Take short notes. Use key points.
- Don't miss class.

Once you have these key points, use them to get exam answers by making up your own set of exam questions. This is exactly what the teacher does in making up an exam, giving us most of the same questions – and the answers, too.

Students at an eastern high school who made up possible test questions later found 75% of the same or similar questions on actual exams. These same students scored almost 10% higher than students who studied without this method.

- Use notes to make up test questions.

When studying from textbooks, most of us mark everything we think is important. A more effective method may be to mark only the parts you *don't know*. Later on, go over those parts. When you finally know them, check them off. There is no need to go over and over information (colored yellow) that you already know. There's no right way to mark up a text for your own personal study. Tear out pages. Write in the margins. Find a system that works for you. After all, it is your book.

- Make notes of what you *don't know* in the text.