



Memory and Learning

What do we remember?

We remember almost everything for a very short time. But what we remember over a longer period depends on how meaningful the information is.

There are two important strategies you can try to make information more meaningful to you.

Strategy 1: Association

This is a tactic where you associate what you are learning with what you already know.

For example, if a physics teacher told you about how an atom works, you may be confused. But if the teacher says, "Think of the atom as the universe, with a sun in the middle, the planets orbiting the sun, and lots of space in between. The sun is like the atom nucleus and the planets are like the atom's electrons." This would make more sense because the new information (the structure of an atom) is associated with something you already know (the structure of the universe).

Link what you are learning to what you already know by trying to develop analogies and examples. You will understand and, as a result, remember the new information better.

Some hints to increase your use of association:

- Read the textbook chapter before class.
- Paraphrase the information in your own words.
- Try to apply what you learn to your own life.

Remember: Pure memorization is not the most effective strategy since it only lasts a short time. This usually happens because you may not actually understand what you are memorizing.

Strategy 2: Organization

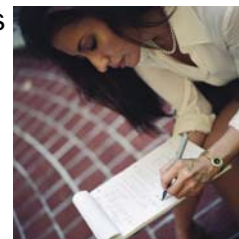
Another way to make what you learn more meaningful is to organize it into groupings, which are manageable in size and make sense to you.

When you have a lot to learn, you can break the information up into smaller groups and give them descriptive headings.

Make your notes on paper or on a computer (make sure you print it out) so that you can shuffle them around into an order that makes sense to you. However, for math classes, it's better to keep the notes in the order presented, so that you can effectively understand how to solve the questions.

Some other hints:

- Make an outline of your notes
- Create a diagram of how the information fits together.
- Use headings and sub-headings in your notes.
- Look for similarities in topics.



Other Strategies

Select. Try to reduce information down to its main points. You don't need to remember everything all at once — work from the main ideas.

Review. It's hard to get into the habit, but if you review regularly, you will benefit from it. Review doesn't mean just reading over. Think about what you are reviewing so you can remember it.