

Forgetting

PROBLEMS - WHY WE FORGET

NEGATIVE SELF-CONCEPT

The people who are convinced that they cannot remember are most apt to forget. You must have confidence in your own abilities.

UNDERLEARNING

When material is not learned well enough, it will be easily forgotten. If something is to be retained, it must be correctly learned first.

DISUSE

Forgetting through disuse is both normal and unavoidable. Material is most rapidly lost upon initial learning. Retaining material requires ongoing review and application.

INTERFERENCE

New material tends to interfere with old materials. In other words, what you are currently learning may cause some forgetting of previously learned material. This is particularly true if the material is similar. The greater the similarity between present versus past learning, the greater chance there is for forgetting, confusion, and inaccurate learning.

Mental overcrowding can prohibit learning. It is difficult to learn one subject if your mind is on a number of other things. For example, it would be difficult to learn your history chapter if you are watching TV, thinking about another course, or worrying about personal problems. Also, continuous study without a break may cause fatigue and boredom, thereby reducing the ability to concentrate.

CHANGED CUES

You may have all of the information you need stored away in your mind but be unable to recall it if the right cue is missing. In other words, if you study the material one way and the test question is presented in another manner, you may be unable to remember. It is important that you put the material you are studying in your own words to make sure you understand it, thus improving your ability to recall the material.

LACK OF ATTENTION AND EFFORT

Remembering involves attending to the material. There must be effort and intent to remember. Forgetting information is greatly reduced if attention, effort, and intent are included in the learning process.

SOLUTIONS: BEFORE THE TEST

To remember, you must become actively involved with the information through reviewing, overlearning, reciting, and testing. Most important is that you must intend to remember.

OVERLEARN

Be able to repeat and explain the information. Get to the point where you can say it "in your sleep".

Why? During an exam, anxiety increases. Anxiety can block the ability to recall what has been recently learned. Recalling what we have "overlearned" may be accomplished even when anxious.

REVIEW DAILY

At least 10 to 15 minutes each day go over notes from class. Carry study note card with you always; pull them out and study them whenever you have the chance - like when you are stuck waiting for a friend or standing in a line.

Why? It is practice for the test. When the material is reviewed, you go through the process of activating and retrieving that idea. This strengthens the "pathway" to the ideas. Daily reviews really work to promote recall.



SAY IT OUTLOUD!

Don't become content just to read or listen to the material. Make yourself talk about the material. Bore your roommate or explain it to a study buddy.

Why? A new and different memory of the material is constructed for each different method - seeing, hearing, saying, etc. The more memories, the better the chance of finding the information again.

DRAW A PICTURE OR DIAGRAM

Make an outline or create an image to associate a technical word with its meaning.

Why? When you translate the ideas into drawings, diagrams, outlines, matrixes, or any other format, you must make decisions on what information to select and how to represent it. These decisions are remembered better than just reading or reciting information aloud.

MAKE UP PRACTICE TESTS

As you review your notes daily, write test questions on 3x5 cards. Write the answers on the back.

Why? You have to decide what question to ask, how to phrase the answer, and the answer you created. On a test, you will be able to use the memory of these decisions to construct an answer to the questions.

CONSTRUCT CONNECTIONS BETWEEN IDEAS

Try to see the big picture. Take some concentrated study time to think about the "web" of knowledge.

Why? It is easier to recall main ideas. If we make connections, we can recall main ideas and then recall or reconstruct details. We forget non-connected ideas quite easily.

FLAG CUE WORDS

Circle words in practice questions that cue the answer. Write synonyms for the circled words. Go backwards when you study - from answer (response) to a question (cue).

Why? Test questions are often worded differently than our practice questions. With one cue, we have only one entrance to the memory. If we have practiced recalling using several cues, we increase our chances of answering.

SOLUTIONS - DURING THE TEST

IF YOU BLANK OUT, DON'T FIGHT IT. ACCEPT IT!

Shrug it off and go on with other test items.

Why? Your anxiety increases and absorbs all your attention. If instead you switch your attention to other questions, your memory will continue to search for the answer automatically. With less anxiety, you may recall the answer before the end of the test.

THINK METHODICALLY

When you return to the skipped items, search your memory systematically for the answer. Pay attention to key words in the question and recall synonyms for them.

Why? Losing something in your memory is like losing your car keys. Ask questions of yourself that lead you to the lost set of car keys.

If you understand how your mind works, you can implement SOLUTIONS appropriately.