HOW TO LEARN FASTER AND (RE)DISCOVER JOY OF LEARNING

20 learning strategies to help you accelerate your learning

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Hi there!
I'm glad you've joined my little rebellion against mindless cramming!
Let's get started.

I'm obsessed with learning. I mean really obsessed.
Whenever I find myself angry or sad I read and memorize something.
So yeah - I'm crazy.
But at least voices in my head have some great ideas!
Together we have collaborated to deliver you this e-book.

You will find 20 strategies to help you to memorize information better.
Most of them are universal and can be used for any kind of memorization.
Some, on the other hand, should be used only to facilitate learning vocabulary.

What's more, don't even think about trying to implement them at once.
You know how it usually ends. You get discouraged and you give up.

Instead, try to implement these strategies one by one.
Treat this e-book as your toolbox which can be used if the need arrives.

At the end of this book you will find a compressed list of all the strategies.
Print it and use it as reference whenever you learn.

Such approach should make your learning painless and effective.
Once you feel comfortable with using one of these strategies, add
another one to your toolbox.

Treat this book as a perpetual source of information about memorizing.
Come back to it after some time, once you have read it.
You might be surprised what you have missed before.

And if this little book helps in your learning, do me a favor.
Send me your success story to universeofmemory@gmail.com
I would love to hear it!

And remember - **knowledge is useless without action**.

Good luck!
Bartosz Czekala

ESSENTIALLY FUNDAMENTAL BASICS

To understand how to memorize we have to know how the memory works.
And that's the thing - nobody knows it exactly!

However, the process of memorizing can be depicted in the following three steps.
It's of essence that you pay good attention to them.

Don't let the apparent easiness of this breakdown fool you.
Knowing something is not the same as being able to use it.

1) Encoding - involves initial processing of information which leads to construction of its
               mental representation in memory
2) Storage - is the retention of encoded information in the short-term or long-term memory
3) Recall - is retrieval of stored information from memory

The information which I'll present to you in a moment are listed as a part of aforementioned steps. Of course, sometimes an assignment of these methods to a particular category can be debatable. However, it shouldn't impact usefulness of these pieces of advice.
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ENCODING

For starters, there is one thing which can't be stressed enough -
the creation of a memory starts with its perception.
It sounds obvious, yet it's ignored so often. It makes me frustrated sometimes.

I should probably create a T-shirt with this writing and scream this statement at the top of my lungs from the rooftops. Or tattoo it on my neck and start touring schools, kindergartens and companies to get my point across.

Without doubt encoding information is the most important step in the process of learning.
You probably have heard of people who remember almost everything effortlessly.
"Geniuses" people say. Are they really? What's really behind the curtains?

What's the secret?!

As always, truth isn't even half as exciting as the results....
Usually it is simply a blend of (elaborated) encoding and some other
elements described below

ENCODING

PAY ATTENTION

If you don't pay attention to a piece of information you want to memorize,
how do you expect to remember it?

We all have said time and time again "I forgot it".
The truth is that most of the times we didn't forget it.
How come? Well. You can't forget what you didn't memorize in the first place.

The prime example is remembering people's names at parties.
People don't even try to remember them,
yet later they declare "somehow it's slipped my mind".

Next time when you really want to memorize something, don't let it flash before your eyes.
Nail this information with your attentive look!

BE INTERESTED

If you don't care about something, you immediately give your brain a command to ignore it.
Our perception is very limited so why should your brain waste its precious resources trying
to remember something useless?
That's why you should always try to make the information you want to acquire interesting.

It might take some time. Some things seem so dull that it appears virtually impossible.
But where is a will there is a way.

FOCUS

Try to eliminate all potential distractions which might interrupt your learning.
It's the essence of focus.
Only then you'll be able to concentrate fully.

Turn off your mobile, lock the door, go to library if you have to.
Sure, it's not always possible to create perfect conditions free of distractions.
That doesn't mean that you shouldn't try.

ENCODING

MAKE IT USEFUL (The Law of Intensity)

The more useful and applicable to the real life a piece of information is,
the more effective the learning.

One weird example? Alright. But I am warning you - it's really weird.
If you stumble across, say, some article mentioning *Achillea millefolium*,
known commonly as *(common) yarrow* you might not remember it.
However, once you learn that this plant can treat bleeding (and even ulcers!)
it becomes more interesting and useful.

Then you tell yourself: "Hey, my wife suffers frequently from painful menstrual periods
and she doesn't like to pop painkillers like candies."
"I can be like a druid and help her out using this plant" !

Don't roll your eyes. I've warned you! :)

FEEL FREE TO CHOOSE (The Law of Freedom)

We learn best when we learn freely.
When you are forced to study you usually have little interest in it

That's why self-development is frequently much better than formal education.
You choose to explore given subject.
Thus, you start with a higher level of motivation.

UNDERSTAND

You learn successfully only when you understand something.
How does it pertain to languages?

Never learn idioms and phrases unless you understand every word in them.
I don't claim that you won't be able to memorize them. It's possible.
However, usually you quickly forget them.

If you prepare presentation at work regarding some topic, make sure that you understand
each component. Once again, you can memorize things you don't understand,
but only temporarily. If your brain doesn't see any usefulness in something, it'll promptly
discard this information.

ENCODING

MAKE IT ABOUT YOU (The Law of Self-reference)

We remember things better when they refer to ourselves.
Think what vocabulary refers to you and describes you well.

For example, years ago I learned the phrase "speech impediment" in English.
It might not be useful to you in other languages but I actually suffered from it as a child,
so this phrase was important for me

USE EMOTIONS

Learning is one of just a few situation where being emotional becomes useful.
Why? Emotions make everything more memorable.

That's why we tend to remember most of the mistakes we make while speaking
with foreigners. Or hundreds of awkward situations which happened so long ago, and yet,
still haunt us at nights.

Why not let it work in your favor?
Do you want to remember some phrase in German? Jump on the table and shout:

"*Ich will dich nicht verletzen, mein Schatz!*"
(I don't want to hurt you, baby!) (no more, no more).

Or start laughing hysterically saying "*fantástica broma!*" (fantastic joke!).

COMPOSE CATCHY RHYMES AND PUNS

Number of ways you can use this method is only limited by your imagination.
Write a poem with the help of vocabulary you want to learn.

If I wanted to memorize the name of the plant mentioned earlier,
I would most likely create some silly rhyme like:

"*There is some yarrow in my barrow to improve the functions of my marrow*".

ENCODING

CREATE ASSOCIATIONS

Probably one of the most important rules.
You see, the easiest way to acquire new knowledge is to bind it in some interesting way
to the knowledge we already possess.

It's just like building a palace.
You cannot simply hang bricks in the air.
They need to be placed on the foundation!

It turns out that many words which seem new to us can be associated easily
with our present knowledge. Every name and a piece of information you have ever acquired
becomes a part of your database!

Let's say that we would like to learn a word "beer" in Spanish.

la cerveza

It sounds similar to : "SERVE US A" beer!
Or maybe: there is something floating on the "SURFACE O(f) my beer"
Being a Polish native speaker I might associate it with "ser węża" which means
"snake's cheese"

No matter how (apparently) hard it seems, creating such associations is always possible.
But it takes some time to get used to looking for such similarities between words and phrases.

However, once you get through this initial obstacle, everything becomes easier and more fun!

USE MNEMONICS

Once you find some engaging and thought-provoking association, turn it into a picture.
Then place it in some location well known to you, e.g. your home.
Then knit it together with some other picture.

Example:

I'll add one more word to our vocabulary:

la cola

ENCODING

USE MNEMONICS

In Spanish it means "a line" or "a tail".

Now, I can imagine a group of people standing in a line at my doorstep trying to get "Cola". Then they enter my foreroom and change their mind. They want some beer now! The screaming ensues! "SERVE US A beer!"

It's really enjoyable way to learn!

USE FREQUENCY LISTS

In most European languages about 1000 words is enough to get by in 70-90% of typical, every-day situations. You don't need to waste energy to find them!

What's the idea behind frequency lists?
It specifies the most frequent words in a language and gives you a great head-start in learning. You can start memorizing vocabulary immediately and rest assured that it's immensely useful.

USE PREFIXES AND SUFFIXES

Find the most useful prefixes and suffixes for the language of your choice and learn them by heart. Very often such approach enables you to create new words on spot and saves you a lot of time and trouble.

"*One study has shown that a set of 20 prefixes and 14 roots, and knowing how to use them, will unlock the meaning of over 100000 words. A similar study showed that a set of 29 prefixes and 25 roots will give the meaning to over 125000 words. Imagine adding suffixes!*" - **Judith Wilde, PhD for Beta Group**

That's food for thought!

EXPERIMENT

Remember - some of these strategies might be right up your alley while others not. It's normal. However, you should always be testing new methods and strategies to learn what's the perfect blend for you.

STORAGE

In this part I am going to concentrate on strategies which guarantee that the information you encoded with such diligence and elegance stay where it belongs - in the long-term memory that is!

What can you do make it happen?

REPEAT IT 5 TIMES (The Rule of 5 by Hermann Ebbinghaus)

The general rule says that it takes five reviews to transfer a piece of information to long-term memory. However, bear in mind, that such reviews should be spaced in time.

Speaking generally, after some period of time we start forgetting information we have acquired before.
To prevent it from happening, we should refresh (repeat) such information.

% of Data Remembered
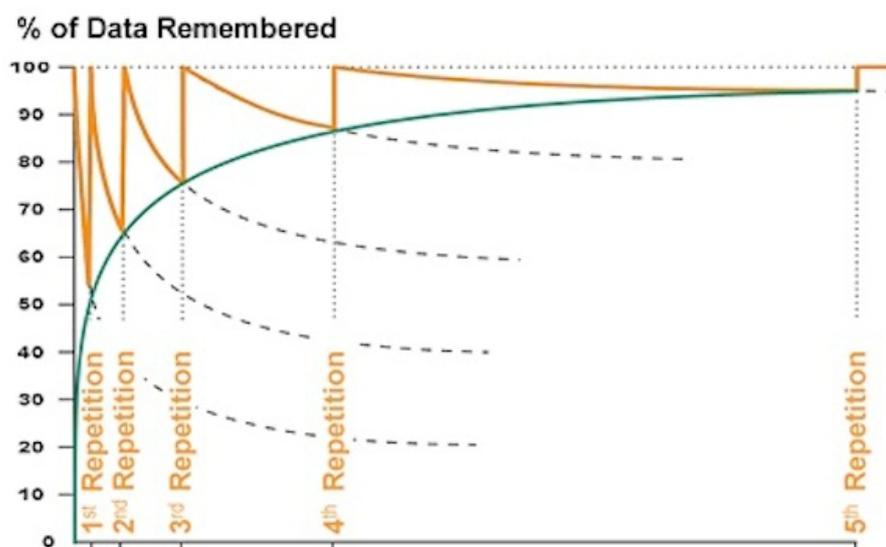
Of course, it would be extremely difficult to know exactly when such a repetition should take place. However, with the little help of technology it's really easy.
Read on!

CONSOLIDATE (a.k.a. spaced repetition)

There are many programmes which facilitate spaced repetitions.
The ones I want to recommend are great and, what's more, free!

If you're on a Mac, check out the app Genius.
If you're on a PC, check out Anki.

STORAGE

FOCUS ON NUMBER OF REPETITIONS (not time)

Whenever you sit to learn, forget about time.
What ultimately matters is the number of repetitions, not the time you've spent.

USE THE SERIAL POSITION EFFECT

We tend to remember the most items from the beginning and from the end of our studying
It means that the more breaks you have, the better you take advantage of this phenomenon.

If you want to spend 1 h learning, break this time into two 25 minute sessions.
Such organization will be far more beneficial to you than learning for 1 h without
any breaks.

RETRIEVAL

Once you learn how to encode and store information, it should be relatively easy to retrieve it.
However, it's good to know about two elements which might impact this step.

ENVIRONMENTAL TRIGGERS

The information is retrieved easier in the same environment (and emotional states) in
which it's been acquired. That's why it is important to ensure a variety of situations and
places during the learning process.

ACTIVE RECALL

If you want to be able to use your knowledge actively, practise it actively.
Speaking is an active process.
That's why you should speak as often as you can to strengthen neural networks in your brain.
Being able to read or fill gaps in exercises is not the same thing as being able to speak.

THE END

That's all folks.

There are many other laws and methods which facilitate learning, but the ones presented in this e-book are, without doubt, the most important.

They are your map to better memory and work like a charm.

I still remember that a couple of years ago, it seemed crazy to be able to learn 20 words per day. Fast forward till now and 100 a day are not that big of a deal.

Give yourself a chance to change your life.

Take care!
Bartosz

"Try again. Fail again. Fail better."

- Samuell Beckett

ENCODING

* pay attention
* be interested
* focus
* make it useful (the law of intensity)
* feel free to choose (the law of freedom)
* understand
* make it about you (the law of self-reference)
* use emotion
* compose catchy rhymes, puns and phrases
* create associations
* use mnemonics
* use frequency lists
* prefixes and suffixes
* experiment

STORAGE

* repeat it five times (the rule of 5)
* consolidate (a.k.a. spaced repetition)
* focus on number of repetitions (not time)
* use the Serial Position Effect

RETRIEVAL

* environmental triggers
* active recall