

THE MEMORY TOOLBOX

by Bronwen Wall



How good is your memory? Let's start with something easy. Close your eyes and think about your teacher. What shoes are they wearing? Now try thinking back a little further. What did you have for dinner last night? What did you do on Saturday morning?

Our brain uses memory to store and then recall information about the things that happen and the things we learn. Memory helps to make us who we are.

Types of memory

Our **short-term memory** holds the information that we need for only a small amount of time. Most of this information stays in our heads for less than a minute. We can usually hold about seven things at once in our short-term memory. Examples of short-term memories are remembering where you just put your pencil or what your teacher just asked you to do.

But what if your dad gets a new phone and you want to remember the number? If you use your short-term memory, you'll forget it in a few seconds. You need to put the number into your **long-term memory**. You can do this by writing it down, repeating it in your head, and saying it aloud a few times. Doing this moves the number from your short-term memory to your long-term memory. Information in your long-term memory can last for a few days ... or for many years!



Look at these pictures, then close the book and write down all the items you can remember.



Training your memory

We all use our memory every day, but some people seem to have a better memory than others. Did you know that you can train your memory to hold more information? Here are some ways to do that.

Write it down.

Write down the things that you need to remember.



Repeat it.

Repeat the information aloud or in your head. This can help you remember it, too.



Chunk it.

Break the information into small pieces (chunks). For example, if your dad's new phone number is 0243546889, you might find it easier to remember if you chunk it like this: 024-354-6889.



Say it aloud.

Scientists have discovered that saying words or numbers aloud helps us to remember them.



Sing it.

Sometimes it's easier to remember something by singing it in a song. For example, there are waiata such as "Ngā Tamariki o Matariki" that help people to remember the names of the stars that make up Matariki. There are also some well-known songs that help young children remember the alphabet.



Create a mental picture.

Link the thing you need to remember to a picture in your head. For example, maybe there's a new teacher at school called Mr Wheeler. If you picture him standing next to a bicycle wheel, it might help you remember his name.



Make up a silly sentence.

Perhaps you want to remember the planets in our solar system – Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune. You might find it easier to remember their names (and in the right order) if you think of the sentence: **My Very Excited Mum Just Saw Unicorns Napping.**



Use an acronym.

An acronym is made from the first letter of the words you want to remember. How about the colours of the rainbow? There are seven of them. Some people remember them by using an acronym that spells the name of an imaginary person called Roy G. Biv. The letters of Roy's name match the colours of the rainbow: R = red, O = orange, Y = yellow, G = green, B = blue, I = indigo, and V = violet.



Make up a story.

Perhaps your dad asks you to get some things from the shop. He wants a jar of jam, some apples, and two loaves of bread. You could make up a short story about the things you need to remember.

For example, lamb rhymes with jam, so imagine a lamb. The lamb is walking along the road carrying a bag of apples, and it comes to a river. The lamb can't swim very well, so it uses two loaves of bread as water wings. It's a silly-looking lamb, but it will help you remember what your dad wanted you to get.



Build a memory palace.

A memory palace is a building that you picture in your head. You store bits of information you want to remember in different rooms in your memory palace. You might place a piece of information in the kitchen, another piece in the bathroom, and another piece in your bedroom. When you want to remember the information, you imagine yourself walking through the palace and looking in each room.

Eat well, sleep well, and move around.

Eating healthy food and getting a good night's sleep can make your memory stronger. You can also help strengthen your memory by moving around. Yes, it's true! Scientists have found that exercise can help improve memory.

Now, all you have to do is remember all these memory tools and you'll become a memory master!

World memory championships

There are competitions to find the person with the best memory in the world. The competitors are given time to memorise things such as names, numbers, dates, and words. Then they have to recall the information. The world memory champion is the person who remembers the most information in the fastest time. Ryu Song I, who was the 2019 champion, recalled 547 numbers in the correct order!

