

An Advanced Placement Program Student Resource Advanced Academic Services Austin Independent School District

IMPROVING MEMORY

These suggestions for improving your memory have been pulled from the UT Learning Center. Visit their site at *Making the Grade* 101 http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/class/mkg_grd/makinggradeindex.html

1. PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER.

Organizing and ordering information can significantly improve memory. Imagine, for example, how difficult it would be to remember a random list of 61 letters. On the other hand, it would not be difficult to memorize the first sentence in this paragraph (consisting of 61 letters). Similarly, learning a large amount of unconnected and unorganized information from various classes can be very challenging. By organizing and adding meaning to the material prior to learning it, you can learn it better and recall it easier.

2. THE FUNNEL APPROACH. This means learning general concepts before moving on to specific details. When you study in this manner, you focus on getting a general framework, or overview, before filling in the details. When you understand the general concepts first, the details make more sense. Rather than disconnected bits of information to memorize, such as history dates, the material fits together within the overall framework. Seeing how the smaller details relate to one another, you process the information more deeply. For example, the approach is used in previewing a chapter for the major ideas as a way to enhance your comprehension of details contained in the chapter. Again, you probably use this type of approach when studying from an outline, matrix, or concept map.

3. ORGANIZING THROUGH MEANING AND ASSOCIATION.

While learning, a person makes associations continually. We make associations between what we are learning and the environment we are in, between the information and our mental states, and between the information and our stream of thoughts. When things are associated in memory, thinking of one helps bring the other to mind. Have you ever actually retraced your path when

you have forgotten where you put an object such as your keys? Often, as you approach the place where you put them, you are suddenly able to remember the act of laying them down on the table or putting them in your gym bag. This is association. You can make associations work for you by making them intentional. When you are having difficulty recalling new material, you can help bring it to mind by thinking about what you have associated it with. In other words - retrace your mental path.

4. ACTIVE LEARNING. Active learning facilitates your memory by helping you attend to and process information. Even if you attend every class and read every assignment, there is no guarantee that you will learn and remember the information. Although you may passively absorb some material, to ensure that you remember important information requires being active and involved, that is attending to and thinking about what you are learning.

5. VISUAL MEMORY. Some people remember information best when it is encoded visually; if that is the case for you, then code information in this manner. But even if you do not consider yourself specifically "a visual learner," you may find that including visual memory can still help. After all, it is one more way of encoding and storing information and one more way of retrieving it for a test. Aids to visual memory include diagrams, tables, outlines, and other graphic organizers, but they also can be as simple as writing out vocabulary words, theories, or algebraic formulas. This allows you to not only practice (repeat) the information but also to see the way it looks on the page (developing a visual memory that you may be able to retrieve later). Another advantage is that it helps you take an active role in

learning the material. When you draw your ideas on paper or write down things you are trying to remember, you have the opportunity to think about the information more deeply.

6. TALK IT OUT. When trying to memorize something, it can help to actually recite the information aloud. You might repeat ideas verbatim (when you need to do rote memorization), or you can repeat ideas in your own words (and thus ensure that you have a true understanding of the information). Repeating information aloud can help you encode the information (auditory encoding) and identify how well you have learned it. If you recite the information aloud from memory (answering questions, defining words, or using flash cards), it is often quite clear how well you know it. If you stumble in your responses, have to look up answers, or can only give a vague response, then you know that you need to study more.

7. VISUALIZE YOURSELF TEACHING THE MATERIAL. An effective way to enhance recall and understanding of dense material is to teach it to an imaginary audience. By doing so, you are forced to organize the material in a way that makes sense to you and to anticipate potential questions that may be asked by your students. Moreover, by articulating your lecture aloud, you will uncover gaps in your comprehension (and recall) of the material. (Far better to discover those "weak" areas before a test than during it.) After you have mastered a particular section from your textbook, try delivering an organized lecture on any topic from that section. Then check for accuracy. Don't forget to anticipate questions that students might ask about the material as a way of anticipating potential test questions.