

TWU Counseling Center

Using Associations to Improve Your Memory

Very few things in life are remembered without making an association to something else we already know. For example, if I say, "bed", what do you remember? Well...whatever you remembered, you just experienced an association of a thought or image with a word. Although we automatically make some association, we do not use them very well to improve our memory and often the association is made, but not in a way that helps us remember something when we want to. The following is a method of improving your associations and an example to show you how it is done.

Remember, memory entails getting information in such a way that you can get it back out. Association, the connecting of two things, assists in both the in and the out processes.

Strengthen Associations by:

1. Making the association process fun or a game.
2. Visualizing. (Allow your imagination to be creative.).
3. Using verbs or action to connect with (have the first item doing something to the second item.).
4. Charging the association with emotions. (Mad, sad, glad or afraid).
5. Keeping things simple (only 2 things connected at a time and in sequence.)
6. Exaggeration and using the bizarre and ridiculous.
7. Practice, which straightens the association.

A short but very informative example:

For example, let's say you wish to memorize the following items in sequence:

1. airplane
2. tree
3. catsup

You already have associations you are imagining for the word airplane do you not? But, do you associate trees with airplanes? Probably not, so let's come up with one. Imagine, if you will, an airplane (whatever kind you like) flying very low, and its wings are cutting down trees with a vengeance. Then imagine the trees bleeding, buckets of thick red catsup after they fall.

You now have made a short, visual chain of associations which are bizarre, emotional, action-connected and each individual association is simple. So now the list is in memory and if you remember what the airplane is doing, you can pull out an image that associates the plane to trees and then to catsup. The chain could be as long as you like. Try it! It's fun!

USING FACES TO REMEMBER NAMES

How many times have you said to yourself, "I recognize that person's face, but I just can't seem to remember her name"? Why not harness this natural ability by allowing faces to remind you of names? Application of the following imagination system will do just that!

STEPS TO REMEMBERING NAMES:

You've just been introduced to someone....

1. Be sure you heard the person's name. No need to feel embarrassed about asking for it again. You're actually exercising a form of flattery by showing interest and a desire to retain the name. Also, it's difficult to remember a name if you haven't heard it in the first place.

2. Conjure up a vivid picture of the name by applying a Substitute Word that lets your imagination go wild. A Substitute Word facilitates remembering abstract or intangible material - as are many names. By thinking of something that reminds you of or sounds like the abstract material (name), and then picturing it in your mind, you can remember even the most tongue twisting name! Take, for example, the name Applebaum. It's simple when broken into - "apple bomb or apple bum". What about Whelchel? "Welk Show" or Wapshott? "wasp shot". Just cover the main sound or elements and you'll have a reminder that works for you. By completing these two steps you've encouraged yourself to be originally Aware - you've listened, paid attention, and concentrated on the name.
3. Now, concentrating on his/her face, select a feature that stands out to you. Bushy eyebrows, high forehead, dimples, flaring nostrils, or whatever will indelibly etch that face into your memory.
4. Form a ridiculous, outlandish picture association linking your Substitute Word and the feature chosen. Ms. Whelchel has a noticeably protruding double chin. Pairing the Substitute Words, "Welk Show" that came to mind with the double chin, picture Lawrence Welk and his band playing on the different tiers of her chin and maybe even bubbles coming out of her nose.

You'll know Ms. Whelchel's name the next time you meet her - depend on it!

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