

Six Rs for Remembering

1. RELAX...

Stress, be it from fear, anxiety, or something else, interferes with memory. There are relaxation exercises available online, in books, and through workshops. However, you can reduce tension any time by simply noticing your breathing. Breathing deeply and slowly will help you relax.

When you are relaxed, you take in new information more quickly and can recall it more easily and accurately. Being relaxed, however, is not the same as being sleepy. Relaxation is a state of alertness, free of tension, during which your mind can play with new information, create associations, and apply many other memory techniques.

2. REDUCE

Reduce distractions to your studying. Find a quiet place to study. Turn off the TV, radio, cell phone, iPad, computer, or any other distraction. Study in short, focused sessions rather than marathon sessions. Pull out the key concepts that will be on the test and focus on learning them first. Divide these key concepts into manageable chunks (remember to “eat the elephant” one bite at a time). Do your best to study when you have the most energy.

3. RESTRUCTURE

When you have a long list of items to remember, look for ways to organize them into categories so that they are easier to remember. Try writing the various pieces of information on individual note cards, and organize them in a way that helps you to remember.

4. RELATE

The information that is already in your brain is arranged in a scheme that makes sense to you. When you add new information, relate it to similar information:

- Create visual associations – invent a mental picture of the information you want to remember.
- Associate course material with something you want – such as thinking about how this material will help you earn that degree you want.
- Use mnemonics (memory devices) to increase your ability to recall things. These may include acronyms (Roy G. Biv = the colors of the visible spectrum); catchy lists; rhymes – anything that helps you remember.

5. RECITE

Speak about the ideas and facts you want to remember. You may give informal summaries of the material to friends or family. In a study group, you can take turns reciting to one another different aspects of the material. It is important to say it out loud, as this uses the senses of feeling (in your throat, tongue, lips) and of hearing. It also is more powerful when you can recite in your own words, as this makes you actually think about and understand the concept. Writing is another multisensory way to recite material, and you find out quickly whether you have gaps in your learning.

6. REPEAT

Don't stop when you think you know the material just well enough to pass the test! Really work with the material, pick it apart, examine it, add to it, and go over it again until it becomes second nature. Then you will *really* know it.