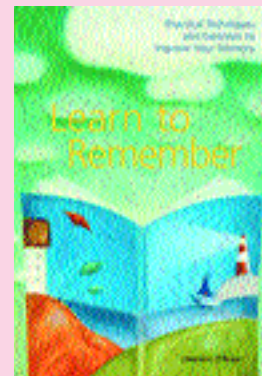


Learn to Remember

by **Dominic O'Brien,**
Duncan Baird Publishers,
London, 2000



Overview

Dominic O'Brien is the eight-time World Memory Champion. This requires incredible feats of memory skills, such as memorizing up to 28 decks of shuffled playing cards. His book is a description of several of the established memory techniques along with advice about how to use them in everyday situations. Many of the memory techniques that O'Brien describes are similar or identical to those offered by other 'memory experts.' Although this book is not written in a scholarly style and lacks adequate footnotes, there appears to be valuable information.

Key ideas

The art of location memory technique-

According to O'Brien, studies show that people who have spent the day traveling are especially accurate in recalling the sequence of events in their day. Even details of conversation seem sharper because the dialog is remembered in the setting in which it took place. To use the art of location, you actually get out and walk a familiar journey, linking pieces of the information to various stops along the route. To remember the information, you would retrace your steps in your imagination later, and try to remember the item that you had linked to it. The ancient Greeks and Romans valued this method above all others and O'Brien attributes this to his personal success.

Mnemonics-

This technique uses wordplay, ditties and other associative techniques. For example, I could create an anagram by taking the word DOT to help me remember the words Determination, Optimism, Toughness. There are many free "anagram generator" programs on the Internet where you can take a random group of letters that represent the first letter of words that you are trying to remember and convert them into a legible word that is easy to remember and triggers off the memory of all the other words.

Visual pegs-

Visual pegs are relationships between the components of a group. For example, if you were trying to memorize sets of five items that had different sized items. To help the memory process, you would think of the largest component and progress to the smallest: (for example: bear, badger, mouse, butterfly, ant).

The story method-

With this method, you would string together a list of items or events that form a logical story. Make the links interesting and add color, suspense and movement to tie the items together.

The Dominic system-

This stands for: Decipherment Of Mnemonically Interpreted Numbers into Characters (DOMINIC). O'Brien links numbers with characters such as 07 for James Bond, 23 for Bill Clinton (2nd & 3rd letters of the alphabet, etc. This is a time-consuming method of learning how to memorize, but has incredible potential for storage of vast amounts of data.

Mind maps-

Mind mapping is a whole-brain method for generating and organizing ideas, largely inspired by Leonardo da Vinci's approach to note taking. Mind maps use pictures, images, color coding, highlighting to stimulate the creative association and enhance the memory. Write the main idea in the middle of a page and connect other ideas with pictures, images and keywords

The art of recall-

Our ability to retrieve memories depends largely on how we organized and store them in the first place. The art of recall is the skill by which we can make the appropriate link that leads us to the memories that we want to retrieve. For example, to remember the name of a town we visited, try to recall as many associative details as possible such as street names, sounds we heard there along with other associated impressions. Often the name suddenly comes from the depths of memory. When a sight, sound or smell unexpectedly triggers apparently forgotten memories, this is called "surprise random recall," and indicates that more memories might be rediscovered if we could find the right triggers to bring them to consciousness.

Remembering names and faces-

The key is to link together the face, name and place in a chain of association. Are there any distinguishing features of the face? Do they remind you of someone else you know who has those features? Do they remind you of another item you can associate that person with? Repeating the name several times and linking it to related associations can help the recall process.

The art of concentration-

To concentrate is to notice what we see, to listen to what we hear, to feel what we touch, savor what we taste and smell and to be mindful

of what we think. If we try to do two things at once, our attention flits back and forth at lightning speed between the two, and we don't fully concentrate on either. The secret to concentration when formally memorizing is to focus fully on the information, while at the same time allowing our brain to make appropriate associations.

Memory and the senses-

Incorporating all of our five senses into whatever memory techniques we try will make it easier for us to memorize and recall. For example, to remember a tree, think of the image, the sound of the wind, the smell of the leaves, the rough touch of the bark, etc. Smell bypasses the filters of the brain, and connects directly to our memory store. Scent can instantly transport us back to an event or person in our past. Associating smell with something we want to learn could help to lock it in.

The art of observation-

When we observe an object in a fully attentive, fully conscious way (noting color, shape, size, features, etc.), the etchings that are made on the brain are deeper than when we merely receive an overall visual impression. Being able to recall precise visual details in the mind's eye is part of a discipline of mental focus and alertness that helps our memory training.

Revision and repetition-

Learning by the repetition of facts over and over again has been largely discredited in education. We now believe that the most memorable facts are those that engage our interest and that involve us in some way. O'Brien thinks that it a matter of rehearsing an act of memory and going over the process of recall at regular intervals, to fix the various routes of association in our minds.

Keeping the mind young-

O'Brien believes that you should exercise the mind everyday just like an athlete stretches their body every day. Crosswords, brain teasers and challenging reading materials can help to keep the mind active. He also recommends that we engage with all that goes on around us, associate things we want to memorize with all of their sights, sounds and smells. O'Brien believes that memory does not deteriorate with age, only the speed at which our brain processes and stores our memories will change. Having confidence and avoiding the stereotype that our brain will deteriorate helps overcome the image. Oxygen to the brain is also very important to keep the memory sharp, and physical exercise can help.