

Mnemonic techniques

1. **Rhymes.** Thirty days hath September ... How many of us remember this one? This technique works just as well for memorizing dates and facts: Examples:

America discovered:

In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.

Path of incoming air (in order):

Pharynx, larynx, trachea, left and right bronchia, bronchioles, alveolus. (This is an ideal list because there are three rhymes or almost-rhymes built in to the sequence. If you want, you can pronounce bronchi as bronchia.)

2. **Silly sentences.** When the list must be memorized in order, form a sentence from the initial letters of the words you are trying to memorize. Examples:

Remembering the division of the animal kingdom (in order):

Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species
King Paul Called Out For Gus and Sam

Remembering the six stages of fertilization (in order):

Contact, Entry, Blocks to polyspermy, Activation of cell, restart of Meiosis, and Amphimixis.
Count Every Blockhead Acquiring My Amphibians

3. **Acronyms.** Make a word using the first letter from each word that needs to be remembered. This works only when the list is fairly short and when the order of the words can't be shifted. Perhaps in elementary school, you learned the names of the Great Lakes by using "HOMES" (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior). This works just as well for more complex lists. Example:

The four stages of mitosis (in order):

Prophase, metaphase, anaphase, telophase (PMAT)

4. **Abbreviations:** Using the first letter of each word but it doesn't spell a word. Example:

Path of the blood (in sequence):

Right atrium, right ventricle, pulmonary artery, lungs, pulmonary vein, left atrium, left ventricle, body (RA, RV, PA, L, PV, LA, LV)

5. **Flashcards:** Write the name on one side of the card, and the definition, formula, or pertinent information on the other side. For more information, see [Reduce Exam Anxiety](#).

6. **Gimmicks:** Word games or tricks to help you remember. Examples:

How to spell principal when talking about a school administrator by referring to him/her as your pal. The rule or belief, principal, ends in "le" not "pal".

In flowering plants, the male reproductive structures are the stamen.

7. **Mind Mapping.** Our eyes are highly advanced cameras that take in learning better in pictures. It may sound silly, but if you pretend to be a camera, you can easily engrave things on your memory. For example, I often take notes in different color pens and include drawings on the pages. I also try to fit as much related information on a page as possible in a cluster outline. Later, I just take a mental snapshot of the page so I can easily recall the items on that page.

Remember to keep your notes in outline form: It's just easier to remember images or key words than to try to bring back general, lengthy texts or long event sequences. Drawing relationships on paper (even faces, objects, or stick figures) can help you recall them later.

8. **Music.** It's amazing how many of us can still remember the lyrics of songs we heard 10, 20, or more years ago. And who can't remember the music notes since watching "The Sound of Music"? Back in seventh grade, I had to conjugate the French verb "*faire*" (to make). So, I made up a short jingle that I remember to this day.

9. **Categories.** Even if the information seems to have no organization, try to impose one. Most information can be organized in some way, even if only by the look or sound of the words.

Before you attempt some mnemonics of your own, break your study material down into **manageable chunks of about seven items**. Remove duplicate or redundant text from your notes, so you can minimize the amount of material you'll need to review. Try to insert examples in place of meaningless text, if it will help you understand the concepts better. Relate the information to what you already know and find some way to apply it in your daily life. Above all, relax and make learning fun!

Strive to use these techniques as much as possible, not just for schoolwork. Like your body, the more you work it, the stronger it will become.

