

Mnemonic Devices: The Solution to Memory Failure

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Abstract: This paper is an explanation of how to solve the issue of memory failure and forgetfulness in students through the use of mnemonic devices. This paper will explain to a reader how using mnemonic devices can help students better remember hard facts and long lists of information, as well as better focus students and help them pay attention in class. Mnemonic devices have been around for quite awhile, and yet some teachers fail to utilize them as a helpful tool to better their students and fortify their classroom. Mnemonic devices have been proven to work by countless experiments, and this paper will explain the benefits of mnemonics and the many different ways a teacher can implement them into their teaching styles.

Keywords: *mnemonic device, memory, focus, acronym, rhyme, buzzword*

An obvious problem many teachers face is their students not remembering all of the information they have been taught. It is hard to enough to cover everything on the curriculum in one year, let alone make sure students remember everything they need to know for a test or assignment. Another problem teachers face is a student being unable to stay focused or pay attention. Students these days have so many distractions available right at their fingertips. From new technology, to lack of sleep, to personal issues, a student can have their mind preoccupied on anything and everything besides the subject at hand.

A wonderful solution to these problems is to use a simple mnemonic device. A mnemonic device is a technique someone can use to help them improve their ability to remember, and to better focus the brain so it is able to recall information at a later point in time. Mnemonic devices have been around for quite some time, yet many teachers do not take advantage of this device that has been proven to work in students. And this technique is not limited to a certain group of students either. This method of teaching has been proven to work on the typical student,

along with learning challenged or disabled students, as well as students who are speakers of foreign languages. The mnemonic device should become more popular as a good teaching practice, as it has been proven by countless research projects to be effective. The mnemonic device should be used as one of the best teaching practices a professor can use.

In order to best prove that mnemonic devices really do work, and work very effectively, the first order of business is finding research and studies completed that prove the power of the mnemonic device. A study, done by G. H. Bower in 1972, tested subjects by giving half of the participants a mnemonic device to better remember the list of nouns they were given to memorize. The other participants were given no device, and had to try to memorize the list with no assistance. The subjects were then asked exactly one day later to recite the list of nouns. Both subject groups were able to produce almost all of the words. However, when tested a week later, the half of the participants that used the mnemonic device were able to produce twice as many of the nouns compared to the half that did not receive the mnemonic device. When tested two weeks after the initial learning, the mnemonic group once again tested higher than the other group. This study is an excellent example of how mnemonics do work, and it is also an excellent example of why teachers should be using mnemonic devices. As a student, it is easy to simply remember something for a short time, pass a test and move on to the next subject. But that causes major problems for students later in life when they need to recall the information they learned earlier. A mnemonic device makes retrieving information from the brain easier. Teachers should be using them in order to better help students remember important information they will need for future tests. Instead of simply preparing students for the next test, teachers could be preparing students for every test to come.

There are many different examples of mnemonic devices. One of the most popular types is a rhyme used to help the learner remember a

fact. For example, "In fourteen hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue". This little rhyme can help a student remember the exact year Christopher Columbus discovered the Americas. Another example could be "Six and eight went on a date, and had to be back by four past eight." This one helps a student remember a tricky multiplication problem. Rhyming mnemonics are very helpful to young children, as rhyming gives them double the opportunity to remember. By remembering one word, it is likely the child will be able to find the matching word to finish the rhyme. A very useful rhyme history students can use to remember what happened to all of Henry the 8th's wives is: divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, and survived. This simple little rhyme can help students remember a complex order of events that most struggle to remember. By using the mnemonic device of rhymes, teachers give their students a better chance of remembering important information.

Another popular type of mnemonic device is the acronym. An acronym is when the first letter of each word in a string of words spells out another word. For example, by using the acronym Roy G. Biv, a student can remember all of the colors of the rainbow in the order they appear in: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. One of the most popular acronyms used by students in science classes is King Henry Died By Drinking Chocolate Milk. This acronym helps students to remember the different prefixes used in the metric system. As children in the United States don't use the metric system until later in life, this mnemonic device can save a student a lot of trouble by making it very simple to remember all of the different measurements. Acronyms can even be used in foreign language classrooms. A Spanish teacher can help their students remember the irregular forms of command verbs by giving them the acronym "Vin Diesel Has Ten Weapons". This mnemonic device, when said with a Spanish accent, spells out every single irregular command verb a Spanish student could need to know: Ven Di Sal Haz Ten Ve Pon Se. This acronym can save students a lot of headaches when trying to learn a foreign language. Acronyms are a fantastic way to remember lists of information.

A mnemonic device does not only come in the form of a rhyme or acronym though. A mnemonic

device can be more than a phrase used to remember specific information. Mnemonics can also be used to better store and recall information, along with better focusing students. In a study done by F. Bellezza in 1982, a group of people were told a "buzzword" or a word to associate with learning. For example, while learning and following along with a lecture, participants would hear a specific word right before a piece of very important information was shared. A teacher could utter the word "Damn!" right before or after a vital piece of extremely important information. This is a cue to the students that they better remember what was just spoken. The mild swear word would certainly catch the attention of students, and would guarantee their attention. Later on while taking a test, students would be able to recall information better by remembering what was said before or after the "Damn!" The students would associate the buzzword with the information in their brains, thus making recall easier.

Mnemonic devices are not only superb for the average student, but they also work fantastically for students with learning disabilities and for students that need a little extra help learning. According to an article by S. Graham and K. Harris, a mnemonic device is an effective teaching strategy for teaching students with learning disabilities. It helps the students by making information easier to organize. It also helps disadvantaged students as a mnemonic device is often repeated, and the repetitive action of saying a word or phrase over and over can be very helpful to really drill the information into a student. By employing the use of mnemonic devices, teachers will be better able to reach out to all of their students. This will better ensure that students can be on a more even playing field, and it will help give every student a chance to learn and remember important information.

Many students in today's schools struggle with the process of memorization and recall. An even bigger number of students deal with an increasing amount of distractions that can slow down or inhibit their learning. By using mnemonic devices, teachers would be able to reach a wider variety of students, and would be able to help different student through the same method.

Mnemonics are a fantastic way to help students remember difficult facts and information by teaching through rhymes, acronyms and buzzwords. If more teachers used mnemonic devices, students would be better prepared for tests. Being better prepared for tests creates more confident and education-hungry children. Implementing a mnemonic into the classroom should become every teacher's goal.

References

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