

# How To Remember Literally Everything

By Carolyn Gregoire: 09/30/2013

"Memory is the treasury and guardian of all things," the Roman philosopher and statesman, Cicero once wrote. And though it was important at the time of Da Oratore, his dialogue on cultivating the power of remembrance, the art of memory is possibly more relevant than ever. Constant digital distractions and multitasking can have a negative effect on working memory.

Collectively, our memories do seem to be getting fuzzier: A recent poll found that Gen Y-ers between the ages of 18 and 34 are more likely than the 55-plus set to forget what day it is (15 percent vs. seven percent) and where they put their keys (14 percent vs. eight percent). They also forget to bring their lunch (nine percent) or even to take a shower (six percent) more frequently than seniors.

Poor memory can strike at any age, and it could hinder your work and personal life. We all remember using mnemonic devices in school (Did "Never Eat Shredded Wheat" get you through third grade geography?), but memory tricks can be more than just study aids. As adults, there are a number of simple and practical tools to help you remember people's names and stop forgetting where you parked your car or left your keys.

Try these eight hacks to super-power your memory.

## Visualize it.



Need to memorize a list of terms or names? You'll have a better chance of being able to recall them if the words are associated with an image -- particularly if you consider yourself a visual learner (which 65 percent of the population is estimated to be). For example, if you have to remember a meeting at 4:30 p.m., try remembering your favorite quartet (The Beatles?) and a 30th birthday cake. It may sound silly, but you'll be grateful when you're right on time.

### **Try a brain game.**



Brain-stimulating games like sudoku and crosswords can be useful. And there's also Lumosity, a set of exercises for computer or phone that were created by a team of neuroscientists and improve the memory of 97 percent of users in only 10 hours of playing. Studies have yet to determine precisely how these games boost memory, but there's good reason to believe that they are effective: A new study in people over age 60 found that playing a video game meant to train the brain boosted the subjects' ability to multitask.

"My guess is that playing them activates synapses in the whole brain, including the memory areas," Marcel Danesi, author of *Extreme Brain Workout*, told Fox News.

**Use the Cicero method.**



Also known as the Method of Loci or the "memory palace," Cicero's tool for remembering information, outlined in *De Oratore*, uses the power of support images (in this case, physical locations) and memorized spatial relationships to recall information. As psychologists John O'Keefe and Lynn Nadel explain in *The Hippocampus as a Cognitive Map*:

In this technique the subject memorizes the layout of some building, or the arrangement of shops on a street, or any geographical entity which is composed of a number of discrete loci. When desiring to remember a set of items the subject literally 'walks' through these loci and commits an item to each one by forming an image between the item and any distinguishing feature of that locus. Retrieval of items is achieved by 'walking' through the loci, allowing the latter to activate the desired items.

Try this technique by "walking" through the rooms of your house or apartment in your mind's eye, and attaching information to each room -- then, recall the information by going back through each room.

**Try the Baker-baker method.**



In a psychological experiment known as the Baker-baker paradox, subjects were put into two groups and shown a picture of a man. One group was told that the man's last name was Baker, while the other group was told that the man was a baker. When later shown the image and asked to recall the associated word, those who were told the man's occupation were much more likely to recall the word. The explanation is simple: Although the two words and photos were exactly the same, when we think of a baker, other images and something of a story come to mind (aprons, kitchen, fresh bread).

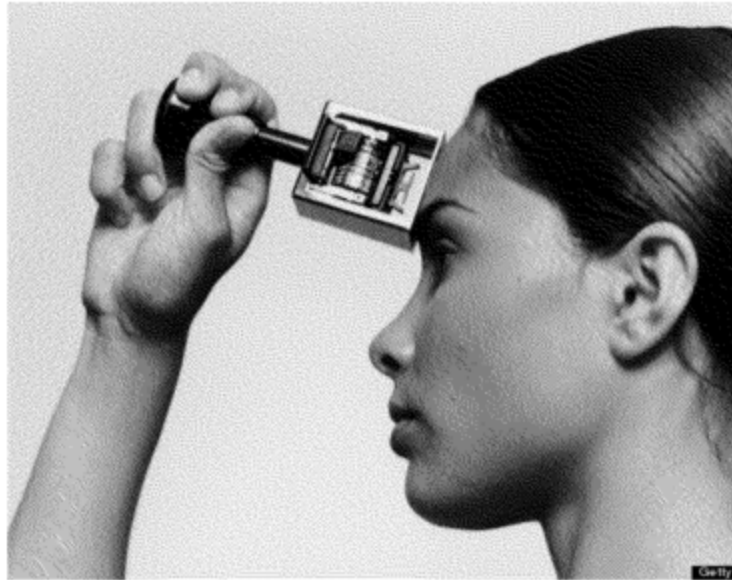
One Fast Company contributor says that applying the paradox -- using the story of Lance Armstrong to remember complex and detailed information about chemotherapy -- helped get him through med school. So when trying to remember details, try to create a "hook" by connecting the information to a person or story -- the strong association will ensure that you remember the information more clearly.

## **Take a nap.**



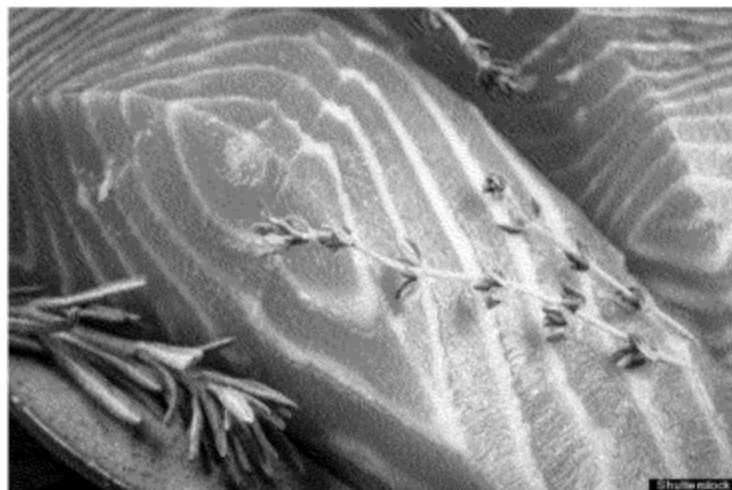
Here's a good excuse to put work on hold for an hour this afternoon: Taking a longer nap can boost learning and memory. NASA sleep researchers have found napping to significantly benefit the working memory, and a 2008 study used fMRI scans to determine that brain activity in nappers is higher all day long than those who didn't rest.

## **Label people -- literally.**



Franklin Roosevelt was known to have a memory that would put most of us to shame -- he could remember the name of someone he met just once, months ago, seemingly without difficulty. His secret? Roosevelt was able to remember the names of everyone on his staff (and everyone he met) by visualizing their names written across their foreheads after being introduced to them. This technique is even more effective when the name is imagined being written in your favorite color marker, CNN claims.

### **Eat your Omega-3s.**



Omega-3 fatty acids -- which can be found in foods like salmon, tuna, oysters, pumpkin seeds, brussel sprouts, walnuts and more, or taken in supplement form -- are among the most beneficial nutrients for your brain. A 2012 University of Pittsburgh study found consumption of omega-3s to heighten working memory in healthy young adults. Eating foods high in this healthy fat may also lower your risk of developing Alzheimer's, according to a 2012 Columbia University study.



## Pay attention.



Perhaps the best (and arguably most difficult) memory hack of all is simply paying attention to the task, conversation or experience at hand. Distraction makes our memories weaker, and consequently we are more prone to forget things.

“Forgetting... is a sign of how busy we are,” Zaldy S. Tan, director of the Memory Disorders Clinic at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, told Reader's Digest. “When we’re not paying good attention, the memories we form aren’t very robust, and we have a problem retrieving the information later.”

Have trouble quieting your racing thoughts? Become more mindful by practicing just 10 minutes a day of meditation. A recent University of California study found meditation to improve memory capacity and reduce mind-wandering among students studying for the GRE. And in 2012, MIT researchers identified a neural circuit that helps to create long-lasting memories -- the circuit was found to work most effectively when, you guessed it, the brain is paying attention to what it's looking at.

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