Aids to Recall

Mnemonic Devices

Much of this material was taken from Evans, Rod. *Every Good Boy Deserves Fudge: The Book of Mnemonic Devices*. New York: Pedigree Books, 2007. If you want additional examples of mnemonic devices, please see this delightful, entertaining book.
After reading through this module, you should be able to construct some mnemonic devices of your own to help you remember information crucial to your courses.
Although college courses require higher level thinking skills, you must know the material before you can analyze or evaluate. You are frequently quizzed on names, dates, and other essential pieces of information. How can you remember so much material?
Mnemonic

1. assisting or intended to assist memory; *also* : of or relating to mnemonics
2. of or relating to memory
— *mne·mon·i·cal·ly* \-ni-k(ə-)lē\ *adverb*

**Origin of **MNEMONIC

Greek *mnēmonikos*, from *mnēmōn* mindful, from *mimnēskesthai* to remember

You can use memory tricks or mnemonic devices to help you remember information.
Acrostic Sentences (the first letter of each word is the first letter of one of the things you have to remember). They work best if the sentence is silly or ridiculous. Get creative and have fun coming up with wild sentences.

Examples: My Very Energetic Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas helps us remember.
If you guess the nine planets (when Pluto was considered a planet) in order of position from the sun, then you are right.
Acronyms (word created by using the first letter of each word of the information to be recalled). These work best if the lists or terms are shorter and have some vowels.

Examples: HOMES helped us recall the five________________?

If you guessed the Great Lakes—Heron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior—you are right.

PEMDAS in math class helps us remember the order of operations: Perform the operations in Parentheses first, then Exponents, then solve Multiplication and Division from left to right, then finally solve Addition and Subtraction from left to right.
Rhyming

- Rhyming (using a rhyme to remember information)
- Examples: “In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”
- “I before E except after C or in rhyming with A, as in neighbor and weigh.”
Wordplay

- Wordplay (use of rhyme or other play on words to trigger recall)
  - Example: “Can you play oboe with your toe?” as a way of remembering spelling of “oboe.”
  - Example: To remember how to spell “separate”, remember that there is “a rat” in the middle
  - Separate
Chaining (a way to link facts by making associations between them; this can involve visualizing a series of connected images or creating a story to connect terms or concepts).

Example: In remembering a grocery list, you could visualize a huge egg, which cracks open, revealing a milk carton, which breaks to reveal a jug of laundry detergent, which opens to reveal orange juice.
Chunking (making information manageable by grouping related information in smaller units).

- Examples: telephone numbers are easier to remember in their chunks: 2026855343 vs. 202 685 5343. Vocabulary is often more easily learned if words are related (for example, think of chapter themes) in many vocabulary books.
Keywords (thinking of a key word that sounds like information you need to remember).

If you meet someone named Bill, think of him eating his electric bill. If you meet someone named Robin, you think of the bird.
Loci Method

- **Loci method** (associating familiar places with information).
- This is what you use when you retrace your steps to find something you lost, for instance your keys. Or when learning the properties of a wave, a student wrote *crest* and taped the word to the ceiling of his bedroom, wrote *trough* and taped it to the floor, taped *wavelength* next to a ruler on his desk, placing *frequency* next to a calendar by his desk to think of number of wavelengths in a given period of time, and last taped the word *amplitude* (height of the wave) on his bed.
Pegwords

- **Pegwords** are short words that describe easy-to-visualize objects whose names rhyme with specific numbers). These are commonly used pegwords to represent the first six numbers: bun (for one), shoe (for two), tree (for three), door (for four), hive (for five), and sticks (for six). To remember the number 23 for a quiz, you would think of a shoe on a tree.
Examples of Mnemonics in Various Disciplines

- Astronomy: J–Sun (for the four largest planets in order of decreasing size)
- J–Sun emptied Vanessa’s M&M plate. (planets largest to smallest before 2006, considering Pluto a planet) (acrostic)
- Oh, be a fine guy/girl, kiss me right now, sweetheart. (acrostic)
Aviation

- The Wright Brothers had glee in 1903. *(rhyming)*
- **CIGAR** (checklist for takeoffs—controls, instruments, gas, altitude indicator, radio) *(acronym)*
Baseball

- Chicago White’s Joe Foolishly Gambled With Mobster Rothstein
- (players involved in the Chicago “Black Sox” scandal in 1919 were Cicotte, Williams, Joe Jackson, Felsch, Gandil, Weaver, McMullin, and Risberg) (acrostic)
Biology

- A Promotion Feels Powerful And Excellent (six biological kingdoms: Archaebacteria, Protista, Fungi, Plantae, Animalia, Eubacteria) (acrostic)
- In Paris Men Are Tall (cell division: mitosis—interphase, prophase, metaphase, anaphase, telophase). (acrostic)
Holly Harrington Likes Beer But Cannot Obtain Food. (elements 1–9 of the periodic table—hydrogen, helium, lithium, beryllium, boron, carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, fluorine). (acrostic)

“Do as you oughta, add acid to water” (rhyming)
Food and Drink

- “Cooking rice? Water’s twice.” (rhyming)
- “Beer on whisky, mighty risky. Whisky on beer, never fear.” (rhyming)
Geography

- As Affluent Norman Sued Andy, Alexis Evacuated. (the continents in order of decreasing size: Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Antarctica, Australia, Europe). (acrostyle)
- I’M NO WIMP (states bordering the Great Lakes: Illinois, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan, Pennsylvania.) (acronym)
Geology

- Only Silly Asses In College Study Past Midnight (names of most abundant elements in earth’s crust in sequence by percent of total weight—Oxygen, silicon, aluminum, iron, calcium, sodium, potassium, magnesium) (acrostic)
Music

- **Music:** Every Good Boy Does Fine (notes on the treble clef lines). (acrostic)
- **Good Burritos Don’t Fall Apart** (notes on bass clef lines) (acrostic)
Nautical Navigation

- **Nautical navigation**: *Port* is left (they have the same number of letters *(wordplay)*
- *Starboard* is right (the word has two Rs) *(wordplay)*
- The *bow* is the front of the ship (when you bow, you go forward) *(keywords)*
- The *stern* is the back (you get a stern look if you back out of your responsibilities) *(keywords)*
In your history class, perhaps you need to remember all of the presidents of the United States of America after FDR (#33–44).


Can you make a mnemonic device to easily remember these names?
Example

- The Elephant Killed John Nix & Fled Carrying Really Big Coach Bags. Oh!
- Acrostic and Wordplay (John Nix helps you recall Johnson and Nixon)
Let us try another one.

Perhaps, for an exam, you need to remember all the countries bordering the Persian Gulf: Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates. Could you think of a way to remember the counties?
Use an acrostic sentence.

- How about a sentence illustrating the location of the countries and triggering your recall of the names: I ran into Iraq and waited (Kuwait) for Sally Ann (Saudi Arabia) and Uncle Andrew Eliot (United Arab Emirates).
Try it yourself!

- Think of an upcoming test or quiz and the information you need to know. Create a mnemonic device to help trigger recall.