

Why We Forget

Forgetting is normal under certain circumstances, but in college, forgetting leads to low grades and sometimes academic dismissal. Below are 7 reasons why students forget and some suggestions on what you can do to overcome each one.

1. Changed Clues

You may have information stored away in your mind but are unable to recall it if the right cue or “handle” is missing. In other words, if you study material one way and a test question asks for the material another way, you may be unable to recall it.

To prevent this, it is important that you learn material using as many of your own words as possible. When you can put something completely and accurately in your own words, it significantly increases your ability to remember.

2. Interference

Psychologists have discovered that recently learned material interferes with recall of previously learned material.

To deal with this, all material to be remembered must be refreshed in the mind by regular review and repetition.

3. Mental Overcrowding

This cannot only inhibit memory but can also prevent learning. Too much input at one time into the senses inhibits learning and remembering. That is why it is normal to experience poor learning and recall when studying with the stereo on, TV going, talking in the background, and worrying about personal problems, etc. Study where it is quiet and where it is going to stay quiet until you are finished studying.

4. Negative Thinking

Students who *believe* that they cannot remember are the ones most likely to forget. You must believe you can remember before you can.

If believing in your ability to remember is difficult for you, see a counselor, or a learning skills specialist, or start reprogramming your mind with positive self-talk such as, “I will remember this,” and “I have a good memory.”

5. Under-learning

The most common reason why students forget is because the material is *under-learned*. To remember something, it must first be learned, that is, stored in long-term memory. If you don't

do what is necessary to get information into your long-term memory, you have under-learned the material and forgetting is normal.

To combat underlearning, repeatedly recite or quiz yourself on your textbook and lecture notes. Discover what you have learned and have not learned before you take a test when you can still do something about it. Learning is a process that takes time and repetition for humans to move information from short-term memory toward long-term memory. That is why when material is reviewed once or twice; it is difficult to remember for quizzes and exams.

Neurochemical and biochemical studies of the brain during the past 15 years have revealed another factor in the remembering-forgetting process. Long-term memory does not occur unless protein synthesis takes place in the brain. Protein synthesis can now be measured using brain-imaging technology.

In 1992, Rose in his book, *The Making of Memory*, shows that when something new is introduced to and understood by the learner that **sufficient review of this material must take place during the following 24 hours for protein synthesis to take place and to achieve long-term memory**. With the tight schedules of today's college students and those who have not yet mastered this skills in college level time-management, student either do not or cannot prevent other activities from interfering with this crucial 24-hour window for learning. Sufficient review is critical to learning.

6. Disuse

Forgetting something because you don't use it is another normal and unavoidable human characteristic. Most forgetting takes place immediately after hearing or seeing new material.

To address disuse, you must regularly recite and *review material to be remembered* until it is stored in long-term memory then, it is less likely you will forget.

7. Effort and Intention are Lacking

What is meant by the term "**Effort**" above is to find out what humans need to do in order to remember and then do it. "**Intention**" means to deliberately choose to remember.

The art of remembering is a direct result of the amount of effort exerted coupled with the intention to remember. Recall is the outcome of the effort you choose to allot to the task of remembering. Furthermore, your mind does what you tell it to do, for the most part. If you don't intend to remember something, you are telling your mind, indirectly, not to remember, so you don't.

To help you remember the 7 reasons why we forget, you can use the memory device below called a mnemonic, or make your own mnemonic. Here, we have taken the 1st letter of each reason and formed the expression mnemonic:

C? I'M NUDE

