

Memory Skills: Stories, Links, Journeys, and Rooms

The Link Method

- This method involves creating ***associations*** between items in a list to be remembered.

Although it is possible to remember lists of words where each word is just associated with the next, it is *more effective* to organize items and their associations into a story: otherwise by forgetting just one association, the whole of the rest of the list can be lost.

As an example, you may need to remember a list of counties in the South of England:

Avon, Dorset, Somerset, Cornwall, Wiltshire, Devon, Gloucestershire, Hampshire, Surrey

The Link Method for this list relies on a series of images associated with each other and organized into a story format:

An AVON (Avon) lady knocking on a heavy oak DOOR (Dorset). The DOOR opens to show a beautiful SuMMER landscape with a SETting sun (Somerset). The setting sun shines down onto a field of CORN (Cornwall). The CORN is so dry it is beginning to WILT (Wiltshire). The WILting stalks slowly fall onto the tail of the sleeping DEVil (Devon). On the DEVil's horn a woman has impaled a GLOSSy (Gloucestershire) HAM (Hampshire) when she hit him over the head with it. Now the Devil feels SoRRY (Surrey) he bothered her.

Note that there need not be any reason or underlying plot to the sequence of images: all that is important are the images and the links between images.

Alternatively this information may be coded by vividly imaging the following scene:

An AVON lady is walking up a path towards a strange house. She is hot and sweating slightly in the heat of high SUMMER (Somerset). Beside the path someone has planted giant CORN in a WALL (Cornwall), but it's beginning to WILT (Wiltshire) in the heat. She knocks on the DOOR (Dorset), which is opened by the DEVil (Devon). In the background she can see a kitchen in which a servant is smearing honey on a HAM (Hampshire), making it GLOSSy (Gloucestershire) and gleam in bright sunlight streaming in through a window. Panicked by seeing the Devil, the Avon lady panics, screams 'SoRRY' (Surrey), and dashes back down the path.

Given the fluid structure of this mnemonic, it is important that the images stored in your mind are as vivid as possible. The more outlandish, comical, ridiculous the images, the stronger they are in your memory. This eases recall.

This technique is expanded by adding images to the story. After a number of images, however, the system may start to break down.

The Journey Method

- The journey method is based on using landmarks on a **journey that you know well.**

This journey could, for example, be your journey to work or school in the morning, the route you use to get to the front door when you get up in the morning, the route to visit your parents, or a tour around a campus. Once you are familiar with the technique you may be able to create imaginary journeys that fix in your mind, and apply these.

PREPARING THE ROUTE

To use this technique most effectively, it is often best to prepare the journey beforehand so that the landmarks are clear in your mind before you try to commit information to them. One way of doing this is to write down all the landmarks that you can recall in order on a piece of paper. This allows you to fix these landmarks as the significant ones to be used on your journey, separating them from others that you may notice as you get to know the route even better.

You can consider these landmarks as stops on the route. To remember a list of items, whether these are people, experiments, events or objects, all you need do is associate these things or representations of these things with the stops on your journey.

EXAMPLE

For example, I may want to remember something mundane like a shopping list:

Coffee, salad, vegetables, bread, kitchen paper, fish, chicken breasts, pork chops, soup, fruit, bath cleaner.

I may choose to associate this with my journey to the supermarket. My mnemonic images therefore appear as:

- 1. Front door: spilt coffee grains on the doormat**
- 2. Rose bush in front garden: growing lettuce leaves and tomatoes around the roses.**
- 3. Car: with potatoes, onions and cauliflower on the driver's seat.**
- 4. End of the road: an arch of French bread over the road**
- 5. Past garage: with sign wrapped in kitchen roll**
- 6. Under railway bridge: from which haddock and cod are dangling by their tails.**
- 7. Traffic lights: chickens squawking and flapping on top of lights**
- 8. Past church: in front of which a pig is doing karate, breaking boards.**
- 9. Under office block: with a soup slick underneath: my car tires send up jets of tomato soup as I drive through it.**
- 10. Past car park: with apples and oranges tumbling from the top level.**

Adapted from: Congos, Dennis H. (2011) Starting Out in Community College. Chicago, IL: McGraw-Hill

11. Supermarket car park: a filthy bath is parked in the space next to my car!

EXTENDING THE TECHNIQUE

This is an extremely effective method of remembering long lists of information: with a sufficiently long journey you could, for example, remember elements on the periodic table, lists of Kings and Presidents, geographical information, or the order of cards in a shuffled pack of cards.

The system is extremely flexible also: all you need to do to remember many items is to remember a longer journey with more landmarks. To remember a short list, only use part of the route!

LONG AND SHORT-TERM MEMORY

You can use the journey technique to remember information both in the short-term memory and long term memory. Where you need to use information only for a short time, keep a specific route (or routes) in your mind specifically for this purpose. When you use the route, overwrite the previous images with the new images that you want to remember. To symbolize that the list is complete, imagine that the route is blocked with cones, a 'road closed/road out' sign, or some such.

To retain information in long-term memory, reserve a journey for that specific information only. Occasionally travel down it in your mind, refreshing the images of the items on it.

One advantage of this technique is that you can use it to work both backwards and forwards, and start anywhere within the route to retrieve information.

USING THE JOURNEY SYSTEM WITH OTHER MNEMONICS

This technique can be used in conjunction with other mnemonics, either by building complex coding images at the stops on a journey, linking to other mnemonics at the stops, moving onto other journeys where they may cross over. Alternatively, you may use a peg system to organize lists of journeys, etc.

SUMMARY

The journey method is a powerful, effective method of remembering lists of information, whether short or long, by imagining images and events at stops on a journey.

As the journeys used are distinct in location and form, one list remembered using this technique is easy to distinguish from other lists.

Some investment in preparing journeys clearly in your mind is needed to use this technique. This investment is, however, paid off many times over by the application of the technique.

Alternatively this information may be coded by vividly imaging the following scene:

An AVON lady is walking up a path towards a strange house. She is hot and sweating slightly in the heat of high SUMMER (Somerset). Beside the path someone has planted giant CORN by a WALL (Cornwall), but it's beginning to WILT (Wiltshire) in the heat. She knocks on the DOOR (Dorset), which is opened by the DEVil (Devon). In the background she can see a kitchen in which a servant is smearing honey on a HAM (Hampshire), making it GLOSSy (Gloucestershire) and gleam in bright sunlight streaming in through a window. Panicked by seeing the Devil, the Avon lady panics, screams 'SoRRY' (Surrey), and dashes back down the path.

Given the fluid structure of this mnemonic, it is important that the images stored in your mind are as vivid as possible, and that significant, coding images are much stronger than ones that merely support the flow of the story.

This technique is expanded by adding images to the story. After a number of images, however, the system may start to break down.

The Room Method

- Imagine a room that you know well: perhaps this is your sitting room, a bedroom, an office, or a classroom. Within this room there are features and objects in known positions. The basis of the Roman Room system is that things to be remembered are associated with these objects, so that by recalling the objects within the room all the associated objects can also be remembered.

For example, I can imagine my sitting room as a basis for the technique. In my sitting room I can visualize the following objects:

table, lamp, sofa, large bookcase, small bookcase, CD rack, tape racks, stereo system, telephone, television, video, chair, mirror, black & white photographs, etc.

I may want to remember a list of World War I war poets:

Rupert Brooke, G.K. Chesterton, Walter de la Mare, Robert Graves, Rudyard Kipling, Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, W.B. Yates

I could visualize walking through my front door, which has a picture on it of a scene from the Battle of the Somme, with an image of a man sitting in a trench writing in a dirty exercise book.

I walk into the sitting room, and look at the table. On the top is RUPERT the Bear sitting in a small BROOK (we do not need to worry about where the water goes in our imagination!) This codes for Rupert Brooke.

Someone seems to have done some moving: a CHEST has been left on the sofa. Some jeans (“G” sound) are hanging out of one drawer, and some cake has been left on the top (“K” sound). This codes for G K Chesterton.

The lamp has a small statuette of a brick vault (WALTER) next to which a female horse (MARE) stands. This stands for Walter de la Mare, etc.

The Expanding Room Method

- The Room Method can be expanded in a few ways: by going into more detail and keying images to smaller objects. Alternatively, you can open doors from the room you are using into other rooms and use their objects to expand the volume of information stored. When you have more experience, you may find that you can build extensions to your rooms in your imagination and populate them with objects that would logically be there.

Other rooms can be used to store other categories of information. Moreover, there is no need to restrict this information to rooms: you could use a view or a town you know well, and populate it with memory images.

SUMMARY

The Expanding Room Method is similar to the Journey Method, in that it works by using known visual pegs upon which to hang information to be remembered and/or learned, in this case to objects in a room or several rooms.

The Expanding Room Method is most effective for storing lists of unlinked information, whereas the Journey Method is most effective for storing lists of related items.

We knew back in 1967 from a study by Gerald R. Miller that mnemonics increased recall. He found that students who regularly used mnemonic devices **increased test scores up to 77%!**