

## Introduction

The ability to remember what has been learned, the flexibility of retrieving and using materials when needed and the speed with which that can be done are very important to students during exams, and these needs form an integral part of most types of exams or assessments. Students often worry about the effectiveness of their memory for exam performance. The good news is that, we can train the memory to deal with the demands on it under exam conditions.

A student's capacity to recall information under exam conditions is assisted through working with his/her materials – organising, reducing and applying learned information. There are certain specific techniques for training the memory that can give students added control over the retrieval and processing of information during exams. One such technique is what we have called: 'making learning materials meaningful'.

## Ensuring that learning materials make sense

Your learning materials must make sense. If the learning materials do not make sense to you, it will be much harder to remember or retrieve the information when you need it.

It is important, therefore, to:

- **Check your initial understanding** – check if you understand the material you are working with as you read. This is a first important step for processing information. Ask yourself this question: Does it make sense? If it does not, stop and work out the meaning. It is important to have understanding before proceeding. This aspect may include making notes.
- **Write it out** – develop an outline of the material without checking your notes. If you need to keep checking, this may be an indication that you have not fully grasp it.
- **Apply it** – you must be able to recall the material easily, in your own words, when you are answering questions you have set for yourself or working with past exam papers.
- **Explain to someone else** – are you able to explain the material to someone else without the feeling that you or the person is becoming confused. Encourage the person to ask you some questions, and see if you can answer them.

## Meaning Making of your material

If the material you are working with does not make much sense to you, what do you do to change that? You need to find ways to ensure it does. You could do the following:

- Go over the material again – to get the gist – what is it about?
- Re-read it, focusing on the problematic parts – make notes.
- Discuss it with someone who knows the subject – like your lecturer or tutor.
- Read different books or journal articles dealing with the subject. These may explain or present the material in another way that can help you understand better.

- Write out what you understand from the material in your own words.
- Draw a chart or diagram to link the different aspects.

## **Making personal connections with material**

One can remember information more easily when it is linked to things that hold special or personal meaning for us. You could link your course material to any of the following, for example:

- Significant numbers in your own life – such as birthdays or house numbers;
- People you know, or have read about;
- How you and/or people that you know have been affected or could have been affected by an issue; or how they responded, or would have responded in a given situation.

## **Additional Resources**

<https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/5-new-ways-improve-memory/>

<https://www.dal.ca/news/2013/11/20/study-tips--top-5-memorization-techniques.html>

[Strengthening your long term memory – BB SOS online](#)

## **Summary**

In this section, we have explored how you could make your materials more meaningful and retrievable for use during exams. If you use these techniques, you have a good chance at improving your performance in exams or assessments generally.

## **Reference**

Cottrell, S. (2012). *The Exam Skills Handbook: achieving peak performance*. 2nd Edition. New York, Palgrave Macmillan