

Reading 1

Task 1

Read the article. Choose from the paragraphs (A–G) the one which fits each gap (11–16). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use.

A They recruited 109 young adults and asked them to keep a daily diary for five days. Participants were given one of three sets of instructions: to record in the evening the events of that same day; to record in the morning events of the previous day; or to record in the evening events of the previous day.

B Despite knowing the benefits of writing memories down, many lack motivation to keep a diary, ignoring the fact that it would free some space in the brain to deal with the effects of negative thoughts and sad memories.

C This isn't surprising. Throughout the last century, a number of psychologists wrote about the powerful human need to make sense of one's life.

D If you'd like to increase the chance of remembering and making sense of your past, keep a written diary – and do so just before bedtime as your memories will get carved deeper.

E Writing down what you experience also improves substantially your ability to remember it later, as Martin Conway and Sue Gathercole showed in a series of experiments conducted at Lancaster University.

F The researchers suggest that this is because when we recall events just before bedtime, the memories are consolidated and stabilised during the sleep that follows.

G Nowadays, however, when we're constantly tempted by distractions and besieged by more information than we can process, life can seem disorganised and chaotic. This, in turn, may cause us to doubt our memory and wonder if we'll ever find clarity, direction and purpose.

Task 2

Read the article again and answer the questions in your own words.

17 Explain what 'a sense of purpose' means. (line 2)

18 According to the article, what is non-significant in the process of keeping a diary?

19 What do you understand from 'it's vulnerable to interference'? (line 25)

20 In your own words explain what 'a structured practice of retrieval' means. (line 29)

Why keeping a diary could be the key to a better memory

In recent years, as the popularity of many types of books have declined, sales figures for biographical and autobiographical memoirs have remained strong. Everyone, it seems, wants to tell their story.

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Erik Erikson described the lifelong desire to establish a unique identity and find a sense of purpose. His contemporary Abraham Maslow created a theory of "self-actualisation". Clearly, recalling and making sense of our past helps us establish identity and purpose.

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One of the best ways to remember and make sense of what happens in your life is to keep a written diary. According to Arthur Applebee, Professor in the School of Education at Albany University in New York, keeping a record of personal events – either online or, better yet, by hand – enables you to reach more reasoned conclusions about what you've learned.

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If you wish to make it as easy as possible to recall recent events accurately, the best time to do so is bedtime, as Agnes Szollosi and her colleagues at the University of Technology and Economics in Budapest discovered.

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Thirty days later, participants were asked to recall as much of what they'd recorded as possible. Those who'd kept their diary in the evenings – whether they recounted events of that same day or the day before – had greater and more accurate recall than participants who'd written their diary in the morning.

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On the other hand, it would seem that when memory is in an 'unstable' form, it's vulnerable to interference. When people write in their diary in the morning the consolidation process may be interrupted by the events that happen during the day.

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Start it today and make it a structured practice of retrieval of your life experiences, even if they are trivial, in order to benefit from its short

Reading 2

Task 3

Read the article. Choose from the paragraphs (A–G) the one which fits each gap (11–16). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use.

A "But now, researchers are discovering that memory is far more fluid, always being written and rewritten, not just by us but by others. We are discovering the precise mechanisms that can explain and even control our memories."

B Or what if you could alter unpleasant memories so they're no longer upsetting? Or create entirely new memories of events that never occurred?

C The film's makers also speak to clinical psychologist Merel Kindt, who has discovered that medication can be used to remove the negative associations of some memories - through which she has managed to 'cure' patients of arachnophobia.

D The method these researchers used to achieve this consisted of a combination of small electric shocks and some medication. Although these were reported to be harmless, their use to target and erase memories raised some serious questions.

E Other interviewees include Julia Shaw, psychology professor at London South Bank University, who has designed a system for implanting false memories, and has successfully convinced subjects they've committed crimes that never took place - research that has potentially troubling ramifications for the criminal justice system.

F "Memory Hackers," from PBS's NOVA documentary strand, looks at cutting edge research into the nature of memory, and how it might be manipulated for mankind's benefit.

G Jake is the youngest ever person to be diagnosed with Highly Superior Autobiographical Memory, meaning he can remember practically everything that ever happened to him in his life which makes it difficult for him to distinguish between trivial and important events from his past.

Task 4

Read the article again and answer the questions in your own words.

17 What do you understand from 'replays it intact'? (line 7)

18 Explain what 'the tip of the iceberg' means. (line 17)

19 According to Julia Shaw's research, what is not questionable about memory?

20 In your own words explain what 'manipulating memories' means. (line 29)

Scientists have discovered how to 'delete' unwanted memories

Are there any memories you'd like to permanently remove from your head?

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It sounds like the stuff of science fiction, but according to a new documentary that premiered in the US recently, scientists have discovered how to do just that - and more.

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"For much of human history, memory has been seen as a tape recorder that faithfully registers information and replays it intact," say the film's makers.

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Among the documentary's subjects is Jake Hausler, a 12-year-old boy from St. Louis who can remember just about every single thing he has experienced since the age of eight.

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"Forgetting is probably one of the most important things that brains will do," says André Fenton, a prominent neuroscientist who is currently working on a technique to erase painful memories. "We understand only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to human memory."

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The question she researched wasn't about the potential for memory being false – no doubt about that – but how false it can be.

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The film tells us about very interesting discoveries, and raises questions about the real-world implications of manipulating memories More information can be found on the channel's website.