



## Memories...

Do you remember phone numbers but forget someone's name immediately after you're introduced? Do you ever find yourself with a word "on the tip of your tongue"? Has a friend ever talked about an event that you have absolutely no memory of, even though you were there at the time? Memory is a mysterious thing.

It is our episodic memory that enables us to remember personal experiences and events. This gives us a sense of identity and connection with the past, our childhood, and the key events and relationships in our lives. Some events, or details of them, are more memorable for us than they are for others; consequently, people don't always remember the same things, even about very recent events. Although they may hold the most relevance for us, our personal memories make up only a small part of memory. Most of our memory is taken up by information not connected to our personal experiences. Our semantic memory stores facts, figures, and concepts related to the world, such as knowledge of physics, history, and language. Have you ever met someone who seemed to know everything about everything? It all comes down to semantic memory.

Studying for a test? Our procedural memory acts as a personal storage system for knowledge and skills acquired through repetitive learning. It is this mechanism that improves our effectiveness at recalling details and enhances our performance on some types of tests. But what about those people who seem to be able to "do something with their eyes closed"? This is due to muscle memory—the ability to do a particular action, like touch-typing, without conscious thought. Muscle memory is the result of repeating a movement over and over again. This is why basketball players spend many hours practicing

the perfect shot. And, talking about doing things with your eyes closed, there's also spatial memory, which controls our ability to move around in a familiar space. You can easily find the light switch in your room, but trying to switch on a light in a dark hotel room is another matter entirely!

But what about when our memories play tricks on us? Does this experience sound familiar? "It happened on my first visit to Paris. I was walking along a street, when I suddenly had this strange feeling that I'd been there before..." This is a typical account of *déjà vu*—the feeling that you have experienced a new situation before. It is often accompanied by a remembrance of certain imagery and the feeling that you know what is about to happen next—"When I reached the square, I knew I was about to see..." Some people believe *déjà vu* indicates the power of pre-cognition or a "sixth sense" (being able to "see" something before it has happened). A more likely explanation is that although the overall situation is new, a number of its features have, in fact, been experienced before. It is the combination of these that bring familiarity to this new situation. With *déjà vu*, the whole of the new experience seems familiar. "I *felt* that I had lived through it all before but knew that I *hadn't*."

Then there's restricted paramnesia. A classic example is when you may have a vague awareness of a past connection with a person, but you are unable to identify them when you see them out of context. "I knew that I had met him before, but I couldn't remember where!" Even though our memories might be good, they aren't always what they seem.

—adapted from *The Oxford Companion to the Mind*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., by Richard L. Gregory

**8 IDENTIFY** Identify and write examples of the narrative tenses and time expressions in the final two paragraphs of the online article. Which tenses are they? How do they show the order of events? Discuss your ideas with a partner.

Simple past:

Past perfect:

Past continuous:

Time expressions:

**9 APPLY** Complete the text with the correct form of each verb in parentheses. Then compare answers with a partner. Why did you choose each tense? How does it show the order of events?

We tend to think of memories as being something we can control, but sometimes they can appear out of nowhere.

I suffer from flashbacks, which means I suddenly remember something from the past—usually something traumatic.

The first time it <sup>1</sup> (happen), I <sup>2</sup> (walk) along the corridor at work, and suddenly, I <sup>3</sup> (find) myself reliving a memory. I <sup>4</sup> (have) completely lost connection with the present. I was really frightened by the experience, so I went to see my doctor. She <sup>5</sup> (tell) me that I <sup>6</sup> (work) too hard and that I needed to take some time off and get more sleep.