

Memory Magic

Dave Farrow is a Canadian who appears in the Guinness Book of World Records for having the greatest memory. As a student, Dave had a learning difficulty called dyslexia. Despite his struggles with subjects like reading and writing, Dave found ways to improve his memory in order to do well in school. In 2008, he set a world record by memorizing the order of 59 decks of playing cards in two days. How did his brain store all of this information? According to Dave, anybody's brain can do it, but it helps to understand how memory works.

Your brain is constantly taking in information through your senses. The information enters your short-term memory, which has the capacity to hold lots of information, but only for a few seconds. If you ignore the information, your brain will discard it. However, if you pay attention to it, the information goes into your memory. This is why learning to pay attention is an important first step to improving your ability to recall what you learn.

To help the brain focus, Dave recommends breaking big tasks down into smaller ones. He sets a timer and works as hard as he can for short periods of time until the timer alarm sounds. Then he takes a small break. This keeps his focus strong.

Your short-term memory can only hold information from 15 seconds to a few minutes. In addition, short-term memory can only hold about seven things at one time. Memory champions like Dave have to store lots of information in their short-term memory at one time. To do this, they rely on different tricks.

One trick is to look at the first letter of every word you want to memorize. Then, create your own word, phrase or sentence using all of those letters. This is called an acrostic. For example, if you want to remember all the colours in a rainbow, try remembering the name Roy G. Biv. Each letter in this fictional name matches the first letter of a colour: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. When you want to remember the colours of a rainbow, just think of Roy G. Biv and you will have an easier time.

Another trick is to organize information into chunks. For example, when you try to remember a telephone number, your brain usually remembers it in chunks. You remember the area code as one chunk, the next three numbers as a chunk, and the last four numbers as a chunk. This way, your brain only has to remember three things instead of ten. This works for words as well as numbers. Imagine that you wish to improve your vocabulary. Whenever you learn a new word, study words that share the same meaning.

This way, you learn several new words at the same time and you only need to memorize one definition. Such words are called synonyms. For example, synonyms for the word big are huge, enormous, gigantic, large and massive.

A third memory trick is to use visualization. Say you wanted to memorize how people developed from wormlike creatures into human beings. First, create a picture in your mind for each stage (picture a worm, a fish, a monkey and a human). Then think of a path you regularly walk along.

For example, you might normally walk from the path outside your home, into your house and into the kitchen.

Finally, imagine each picture in a place along that path. For instance, in the garden you might see a worm. There might be a garbage can in the garden. You can imagine that the garbage can is full of rainwater and inside you can see a fish. When you enter the house you might see a bedroom door. You can imagine a monkey is jumping on the bed. Then you might see a member of your family, a human, cooking dinner. Visualize that path a few times and you'll have the information memorized. Visualization works because the brain remembers images well, and the wackier an image is, the easier it is to remember.

If you don't keep using the information, your brain throws it away. If you keep reviewing the information, it will go into your long-term memory. The more you practice recalling the information, the better you will be at remembering it. Try these tips the next time you need to remember a phone number, a new word or something for school.

1. Your brain will throw information away

- A. if you don't keep using the information
- B. if you keep reviewing the information
- C. if your long-term memory is full

2. What is the main idea of paragraph 4?

- A. Your short-term memory can only hold information from 15 seconds to a few minutes.
- B. People with good memories use tricks to help them remember things.
- C. Memory champions like Dave Farrow have to hold long lists of information in their short-term memory at one time.

3. Dave Farrow recommends breaking large tasks down into smaller ones in order to

- A. keep your motivation strong
- B. take as many rest periods as possible
- C. keep your focus strong

4. What is this reading mainly about?

- A. Anyone can have a good memory, but it helps to understand how the brain works.
- B. People with a learning disability like dyslexia can grow up to set world records.
- C. The person with the world's greatest memory is a Canadian.

5. The article suggests using the name Roy G. Biv to remember

- A. the order of 59 decks of playing cards
- B. the colours in a rainbow
- C. how wormlike creatures became humans

6. Your sensory memory

- A. is able to hold lots of information for a long time
- B. can store a lot of information for a very short time
- C. can store a small amount of information for just a few seconds

7. Dave Farrow

- A. wrote the Guinness Book of World Records
- B. can remember more information than anyone else
- C. played cards for two days in 2008

8. Dave Farrow set a world record

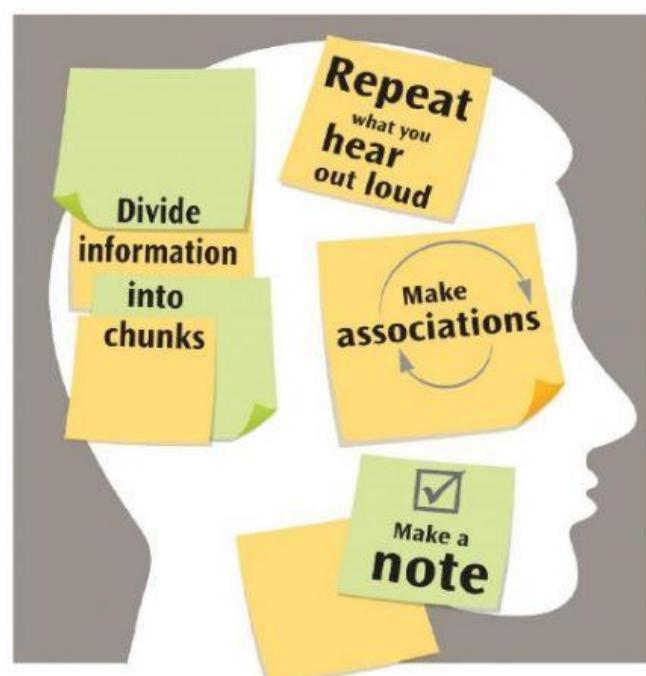
- A. in 1959
- B. when he was a student
- C. in 2008

9. The article explains tricks to remember

- A. the life story of Roy G. Biv
- B. how people developed from wormlike creatures into human beings
- C. telephone numbers, addresses and how people developed from wormlike creatures into humans

10. Dave Farrow is from

- A. Great Britain
- B. Canada
- C. Japan



VOCABULARY

A disability is

- a condition of the body that makes walking difficult
- a condition of the mind that makes learning difficult
- a condition of the mind or the body

Ignore means

- pay not much attention to someone or something
- pay no attention to someone or something
- pay a lot of attention to someone or something

A person who has dyslexia

- has difficulty learning to read and write
- is much better at reading and writing than most people
- can read but cannot write
- cannot learn to read or write

The word sensory means

- something which you cannot see
- something that cannot be heard
- something which involves any or all of the five senses
- something which does not involve any of the five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste or smell)

A champion is someone who

- competes against other people for prizes
- enters but doesn't win a competition
- likes to win
- wins a competition

When you focus on something, you

- pay little or no attention to it
- take a short rest from studying
- study something carefully

Chunks are

- small things you can hear but not see
- things that stop you from concentrating
- bits and pieces of something

An acronym is

- a part of the brain where information is kept for a short time
- a word that begins with the letter a
- a part of the brain where information is kept for a long time
- a word with letters that help people remember things

The word visualize is

- the verb form of the word vision
- the adverb form of the word vision
- the adjective form of the word vision

Synonyms are words

- which mean the opposite of other words
- that sound the same as other words, but are spelled differently
- that have the same meaning as other words

MEMORY NETWORK

What are the three memory processes mentioned on the video?

How can we improve or keep our memory healthy?