

MENTAL NOTES

A mind expanding newsletter from Mark Zust, *The Perceptionist*



Make It Memorable

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How can we better remember boring lists, uninteresting equations or anything else that easily slips our minds? By making it memorable.

I know, I know. You're thinking "Well, duh! Of course you need to make something memorable in order to remember it." Actually, according to Dr. John Medina, an internationally recognized molecular biologist, the most important thing you can do to improve your memory is to get better at *encoding*. That's the fancy term for the process our brain goes through in the first few milliseconds that it encounters and then either retains or discards information presented to it. This is where meaning comes in.

Research has shown that the more we focus on the meaning of the information, the more elegantly that data is accepted and retained by the mind. More importantly, and this is crucial to having a working memory, information that is encoded with meaning is much more likely to be retrieved. After all, there isn't much value in retaining data if you can't retrieve it. The key is using examples that you can personally relate to. For instance, if you want to retain the recipe for Jambalaya, see yourself placing the ingredients in a big, simmering pot. Feel the texture of each vegetable and herb, smell the spicy sausage as you cut it into small pieces and let it tumble from your fingers into the steaming, savory stew. Are you salivating yet? That's an emotional (and memorable) response as well. In fact, the more senses you can activate during your imagining the better.

Now, when someone asks you for the recipe you won't have to wrack your brain to remember the 15 ingredients scrawled on a notecard. Instead, you'll recall the experience of cooking Jambalaya and the memories will flood your consciousness. My 89 year old Mother-in-law is a wonderful cook and hasn't written a recipe down in 60 years. As she puts it: "I think about making the dish in my kitchen and the ingredients just appear." Next month, we'll explore how encoding and other techniques help you to remember numbers and even the driest of data. Until then, bon appetit!

Tapping your emotional memory

Access your personal experiences and remember more longer. Try this simple exercise: Take your grocery list and arrange it in the order that you can imagine yourself "cooking" these items in a big pot. The more ridiculous the combinations, the better, as your mind loves novelty. Mix the bananas, add a dash of cleanser and a heaping helping of paper towels and chicken. Just TRY to forget these items now!



Quotable:

"I have a Teflon brain – nothing sticks!"

Lily Tomlin

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If you enjoy reading *Mental Notes* please forward it to a friend or business associate and stay tuned for information on my latest book, slated for publication by mid 2010.

Resources

- brainrules.net
- nytimes.com/2009/04/06/health/research/06brain.html