

Test Taking Strategies

Everybody takes tests. We have tests in school. We have tests to get a driver's license. Some people have to take tests to do certain jobs. Everyone learns differently. Each person prepares for tests differently.

Some test-taking tips are good ideas for just about everybody.

- Get a good night's sleep the night before the test.
- Eat a good breakfast. Eat some protein, like eggs or yogurt. Also eat something with fiber, like multi-grain toast or an apple. Fiber will help you stay feeling full.
- Study a little bit at a time. Don't wait until the last minute.

There are some test-taking and memory strategies. Some students figure out what works for them. Can these tricks work for other students too?

Test-Taking Trick #1: Chewing Gum

"I chew a piece of grape bubble gum every time I have a math test. I chew it in class when the teacher lets me," says 10th grader Jake Woolsey. "I do better on tests when I chew it."

Can gum really make a difference? Chewing gum can help some people remember. There are two reasons.

Chewing gum increases the amount of oxygen a person gets. This can make the gum chewer feel more awake. The person is better able to pay attention to the test. The person's memory

works better. Chewing the gum also keeps the jaw loose. The gum chewer doesn't get tense. Staying relaxed also helps the person focus on the test. He or she can do his or her best. The act of chewing can even improve a person's mood.

The second reason gum may help is its smell. Smell is closely tied to memory. Certain smells can bring back vivid memories. For example, the smell of a certain perfume may remind you of your grandmother. The smell of sugar cookies may remind you of your mom's baking.

The smell of Jake's gum may be helping him remember how to do the math on his test. He chews the same gum in class and again during the test. The smell may help him remember what he learned in class.

Some scents are better at helping memory. Green apple may be one of the best scents for helping memory. Eat an apple while you study for a test. Then eat another one right before the test starts.



Test-Taking Trick #2: Memorizing a List

“I had to memorize twenty elements in the periodic table. This was for a chemistry class,” said high school sophomore Amber Ramirez. “There were so many names to remember. There were names like carbon and phosphorus and magnesium. I couldn’t figure out how to learn them all. My mom helped me think up a little phrase for each one to help me remember. Like, number 18 is argon. Because when you turn 18, you move out. And you ‘are gone!’ Get it!”

Memory tricks that use words or parts of words are called mnemonic devices. There are many common mnemonics. One is using the name “Roy G. Biv.” This helps you remember the colors of the rainbow in the correct order. The colors are red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet. Another common mnemonic is using the word HOMES. This helps to remember the United States’ Great Lakes. The lakes are Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior.

Memory tricks like mnemonics work because they are unique. The brain will better remember something that is interesting and different. We are less likely to remember something more common. For example, do you know how many white cars you saw on your way to school today? White cars are very common. It is not usually worth remembering when you see one. But if you saw a double-decker bus painted bright green and purple with a parachute coming out of the back, you’d probably notice and remember. You probably don’t see that every day. It’s unique and different. That makes it easier to remember.

Another memory trick is to use music. You may have learned your ABC’s by singing them to the

tune of “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” Adding music helps your brain latch onto the words or information. This makes it easier to remember later on.

“When I was little,” says Melissa Silas, “I couldn’t remember my address and home number. My grandma made up a little song with them. Then it was really easy to remember. We don’t even live there anymore. But I can still tell you the address and phone number. I still remember the song.”

Children’s television shows like Sesame Street often use music to teach. Counting, the days of the week, colors. Multiplication facts, the states in the USA. All of these things can be put to music to make them easier to learn and remember.

If you have to memorize a list of names or some facts for a test, look for ways to make the information stand out. Create a mnemonic that uses the words or letters in a new way. Or try singing the information to yourself. Make the information seem unique or interesting. It will be easier to remember.