RETENTION: Keys for Improving Your Memory

I. Causes for forgetting

A. Since forgetting plays such an important part in academic life, we should try to understand what causes it. Many psychologists explain forgetting by the theory of "interference" or "retroactive inhibition." In this view, new learning gets in the way of the recall of earlier learning. For example, if a student learns the dates of twenty major battles and then the dates of ten minor ones, he may have difficulty recalling the first twenty dates because of interference from the ten learned later. The more the intervening material resembles the original and the more closely the later learning follows upon the earlier, the greater seems the likelihood of interference.

II. Attitude

A. Given two students of equal intelligence and background, the one who approaches an assignment or a lecture with the will to learn and remember will do vastly better than the one who merely does what he must to fulfill an unpleasant duty.

1. The first reads and listens actively, and in the attempt to fit new facts and concepts into the framework of what he already knows, he tends to understand accurately and remember clearly.

2. The other reads and listens passively, content with going through the motions, forming hazy impressions certain of faulty recall--trusting to luck that what he reads and hears will somehow come forth when he needs it.

3. If your bias is toward learning a subject or solving a problem, you have already won half the battle.

B. Dullness is not inherent in any subject, though every subject is dull to some people. It is dull to those who have neither interest nor motivation and whose attitude is indifferent or hostile. In general, the more we know about anything, the more interest we have in it.

C. Another way to stimulate interest is to ask other students how they feel about a subject.
D. Doing some background reading, watching video, or listening to tape will help.

E. If possible purchase the course outline book or reference books. Example: Barron's *Geometry Made Easy*. Many college book stores stock these.

III. Relating Facts

A. New facts can be remembered more easily when you fit them into a framework as you learn them.

IV. The psychology of reviewing: immediate recall

A. This technique for reinforcing memory involves an active technique of mastering assignments by effective methods.

1. One of the best ways to retain information is by immediate recall. This means actively discussing, reciting, or writing in your own words what you have just read or heard.

2. One minute spent in immediate recall nearly doubles retention.

V. Some Further Suggestions

A. Get correct first impressions.

B. Study subjects in a sequence which will hold to a minimum the interference from subsequent learning.

C. "Overlearn" all the information until you have 100% accuracy. This will help you score 80% or better on an exam.

D. Understand the pattern or organization of material. This will help you group facts and ideas meaningfully and alert you to similarities and differences. Look for cause-effect relationships, classification, chronological order, comparisons, contrast, and order of importance; for more explanation see handouts B12.0, B12.1, B12.2, B12.21, B12.3, B12.30, and B12.31.

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