

Transcript for **How to improve your memory**

- Mary:** I'd like to welcome Charles Long to the studio today. Charles has just published an article in *New Science* journal about memorisation. It's all about how to make our memory function better.
- Charles, exam time is looming and there'll be lots of teenagers tuning in today. Can you give us some advice about improving our ability to memorise?
- Charles:** Hello! Yes, of course. I'd like to start by talking about the process of memorisation. It's vital that we understand the process if we want to make adjustments to the way we function. We all use memory in the same way. It doesn't matter whether you're a student revising for your finals or an adult standing in the aisle of a supermarket, trying to recall a particular item from a grocery list.
- Mary:** Ha ha! That's me. I always forget to take my list.
- Charles:** You and thousands of other people too, Mary. We learn to use our memory when we are still at nursery school. Young children are naturally very good at working out how to remember things. The tips I'm going to share today are based on the things we used to do to help us remember when we were children. The process of memorisation occurs in two distinct forms. Do you know what they are?
- Mary:** Are they 'long-term memory' and 'short-term memory'?
- Charles:** That's right! But these aren't completely separate concepts. We use a combination of both types of memory when we want to formulate our thoughts and recall information, whether we're trying to remember something from a decade ago or just an hour earlier.
- Mary:** So what tips have you got for improving the quality of our memory?
- Charles:** Right. Let's start with 'association'.
- Mary:** Association?
- Charles:** Yes. We can use word association to remember an idea or a concept. This means choosing a word or phrase you associate with what you are trying to remember. The word needs to be something familiar, that you come into contact with on a daily basis. So, for example, you can use the name of your pet dog to remember a scientific equation. Try it! Read the equation a few times and then say your dog's name again and again. Later, in your science exam, just recall the name and the whole equation should come back to you.
- Mary:** It sounds too good to be true! What else, Charles?
- Charles:** Visualisation is another trick we can use. So you have to visualise an image that is connected to the thing you need to remember. For example, if you want to remember the date that the Berlin Wall came down, you might visualise a picture of a wall with the date written on it in graffiti. The image of the wall becomes an important part of what you will remember. You can use several images in a row to remember things like information in a text or a list of ingredients for a recipe.
- Mary:** Yes, that makes sense.
- Charles:** Singing can help with memorisation too.
- Mary:** Singing?

- Charles:** Yeah. So instead of reading a text aloud, you sing it. Singing is one of most effective and earliest memory tricks that are used for learning new concepts. I used to ‘sing’ lists of historical facts and dates. It works.
- Mary:** And did you have to sing aloud in your history exams?
- Charles:** Not aloud! But I did used to sing in my head. And I always got good marks for history.
- Mary:** Any more tips, Charles?
- Charles:** Yes! I’ve saved the best one till last. It’s particularly relevant for any students who have tuned in. ‘Teach it’.
- Mary:** Teach it? Teach ‘what’?
- Charles:** Teach whatever it is that you want to remember. So, if you’re studying for an English exam, teach the concepts to someone else. It can be a real person – a friend in a study group is ideal – or it can be a ‘pretend’ person. You can just imagine someone is listening to you as you teach. Better still, record yourself ‘teaching’ and then play back the video to revise the material further.
- Mary:** That sounds like a great tip ... or ‘trick’.
- Charles:** Yes, it really works because in order to teach something you need to understand it. Teaching reinforces the understanding. And although these sound like ‘tricks’, they aren’t really.
- Mary:** No?
- Charles:** No. They are just simple ways that we can train our brains to be more effective. By getting into the habit of using word association, visualisation, singing and teaching, our brains develop and work better for us. And of course that has a knock-on effect on our memory and our abilities to recall all kinds of data.
- Mary:** Thank you, Charles. Now, I think we’ve got time for a couple of questions from our listeners.