

A Memory System You Can Try Today

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The loci mnemonic system is a memory system that you can learn right now and start using today.
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You may have heard of the loci mnemonic or memory system. The general idea is to "place" the things that are to be memorized in predetermined locations in your imagination, so you can "find" them there later. The origin of this memory system is generally attributed to a story told by Cicero, an ancient Roman orator.

{bot_wrgoogle}According to the story, the poet Simonides stepped outside during a banquet. The roof of the hall collapsed, killing the people inside. Most were crushed beyond recognition. Simonides, however, knew the guests, and was able to identify the bodies by remembering where each had been sitting. This suggested to Simonides a system for memorizing things by associating mental images of them with locations.

Greek and Roman orators used this system to memorize speeches. Parts of the speech could be mentally placed in different places along a familiar path, for example. Then, while giving the speech, the speaker could walk the path in his or her mind and "see" the next part of the speech. This made it possible to stay on track in a speech - even a long one - without written notes. A speech could even be rehearsed and further memorized by repeatedly taking that walk in one's mind.

A Memory System For Speeches

To explain further, suppose you're going to give a speech about the need for better education for young children. Your system uses a stretch you have walked in the town where you live. You have selected twenty locations along that walk as your place-holders. These could be a tree, a store, a corner, a house, and anything else that will be easy for you to imagine and remember.

Now, let's assume you are imagining this walk as you speak. You come to a mailbox that is along the route, and is one of your place-holders. In your imagination you see books spilling off the top of it. This is an image you created after rehearsing a part of your speech about the need for better textbooks in the schools. It immediately brings to mind that part of the speech, and you find it easy to continue speaking. As you finish that part, you have moved in your imagination to the next stop on the walk, of course, with another image that will help you recall the important points.

You can place more than one item in each location, as long as they are easily remembered together. For example, in the example given, as you reach a big tree that is along your way, you might have exams falling out of the tree and a huge cake underneath, to help you recall what you want to say about testing and rewards for good exam results. Strong associations help, and that usually means unusual associations, such as those examinations falling from the tree. More on that in a moment.

More Uses For The Loci Memory System

The loci memory system I relied on for years used ten locations in my home. They started with a window at the front of the house, followed by the microwave oven, the sink, and so on around the house. The locations were in order, starting at the front of the house and ending near the back, so it was easy to move from one "loci" to the next in my mind.

When I could remember to use the system (no joke intended), it worked very well for memorizing and recalling lists of things. For example, if I was on my way to the store and had six or seven things to remember, I would quickly place them in order in my system's locations. Then, once at the store, I could easily walk through my house in my mind and recall everything on the list.

The key to making this work, is to make the mental images outrageous or unusual. For example, suppose the first three things on my list were bread, bananas and potato chips. I might imagine someone throwing slices of bread at that window, bananas dancing in the microwave, and I might see myself carefully washing potato chips in the kitchen sink. I

could also have the potato chips dancing with the bananas in the microwave if I needed to fit more than ten items into my ten places.

With wild images like these, I have no problem recalling the list, even the next day. I just do a quick mental tour of the house. This is one of the easiest memory systems you can try, requiring only that you memorize ten or twenty locations along a route that you can travel in your mind.

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