

MEMORIZATION TIPS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome! Once you've drafted a speech or cut a script, and you've run it by a coach for final revisions, it's time for memorizing--the part of speech and debate most loathed by students and coaches alike. No need to panic just yet, young grasshopper. Before you dive head-first into a brick wall, the same one you run into at this point in every season, give the following pages a glance. They are full of tips I've used or seen others used, backed up by credible research about how our brains best retain information. Try and pick one or two strategies that draw your attention. If those don't work, try something else. Don't worry about learning a whole new way of memorizing--many of these tips are probably similar to things you already do



without thinking. Finally, don't be afraid to be a little goofy. If, like me, you like to run introductions to your cases in the shower or at stoplights or during class changes, be prepared for some odd looks. I've found the best strategy for dealing with rubbernecks is to ignore them. The second best strategy is to aggressively recite your speech at them until they look (or run) away.

GENERAL STRATEGIES

Break it into chunks

While it may be tempting to just start at the beginning and reread and reread the whole speech until it settles into your brain behind where the Jeopardy! answers go, this strategy has the double-whammy (I know, I know, mixing my game show references. Sue me.) of being both ineffective and overwhelming. Same goes for rereading sentence by sentence. You might end up memorizing each sentence, but the likelihood that you'll remember the order they go in is pretty slim. My advice to you is to break your speech down into bite-sized chunks--a single subpoint, a single piece of dialogue, that is no bigger than 3-4 sentences. That way, you still have the advantage of getting the sentences down, but you will also have better luck remembering the order they go in.

Space it out over time

While you might see a challenge when your teachers tell you something can't be accomplished in a single night, it's the wrong approach to take when trying to memorize. Your brain might feel very confident after your 4-hour cram sesh full of memorizing goodness, but most of it won't stick, and you'll be tired and cranky to boot. Try and give yourself a week to memorize, and try to nail down a paragraph or so (around 2 minutes of performance time, for debaters and interpers) per day. NOTICE: I did not say that you *HAD* to carve out time in your schedule to dedicate to memorizing, though you'll find it helps. Like I mentioned before, I always try to fit memorizing into the idle time I usually spend doing other things, like showering, mowing the lawn, or sitting in traffic. Try and fill the gaps in your daily life, and supplement on top of that. However you choose to slice up the schedule, keep in mind that doing the work of memorizing in little bites can seriously improve your outcomes come Saturday.



Identify key words and ideas

No matter which strategies for memorizing you choose, you'll need to first lay out which ideas are super important. If you are in Original and I made you complete an outline, hooray! You already have a handy-dandy list of keywords and phrases at your fingertips. For interpers, Congressional representatives, and that one stray debater who refuses to flow, do yourself the favor of walking through your text and picking out (in order) what the important concepts are. For one, it will seriously help you out later, and second, it's a good way to "warm up your brain" to the idea of memorization.

WHAT KIND OF LEARNER ARE YOU?

Before we dive too deeply into strategies for memorizing, it is helpful to identify the kinds of strategies that would probably work best for you. To do that, it's worth

thinking about the kind of learner you are. Generally speaking, there are four kinds of learners:

- Read-write learners
- Auditory learners
- Visual learners
- Kinesthetic learners

Each kind of learner will succeed using different strategies, so let's break down the types a little further, so you can self-identify what might work best for you. A note of caution before we begin: Identifying the type of learner you are is imprecise work, and you may find that some strategies "designed" for a different type might work well for you. Use this guide the way you might read your horoscope: If you don't like the strategies in your grouping, keep reading until you find one that fits. If you prefer an online quiz, there's a great one here:

<http://vark-learn.com/the-vark-questionnaire/>

Visual learners

- Prefer diagrams or charts over definitions of new concepts
- Tend to rewrite notes with lots of colors, symbols, or drawings
- Remember what they saw (on the board, for example) over what they heard
- May have trouble remembering verbal instructions
- May take copious notes

Auditory learners

- Learn by listening
- Prefer lectures and discussions
- Often read texts aloud (to themselves or others)
- May prefer studying with others

Read-write learners

- Tend to enjoy reading(huh, imagine that)
- Prefer reading by themselves rather than being read to
- Often take exhaustive notes or make long lists
- Work best in quiet areas
- Prefer to study alone

Kinesthetic learners

- Learn by doing
- Tend to enjoy science experiments
- Often use their 5 senses in learning
- Tend to create examples for themselves when studying
- Tend to fidget/Need lots of breaks when studying

→ Prefer looking at practice exams/questions over study notes

Got the idea? Perfect. Keep that in mind when you start digging through the memorization tips.

FOR VISUAL LEARNERS

- Method of Loci
 - Also known as a “memory palace”, this technique is used by some of the world’s most competitive memorizers (which is a totally real thing, btw. Check out *Moonwalking with Einstein* for more information). Think about a trip you take often, like the drive to school, or the way you walk through your house on the way to your bedroom. I like to use the setup of the cabinets in my kitchen: I know where everything goes, and I don’t have to think about where anything is, because it’s always in the same place. Any kind of route like that will work. The idea here is that you’ll “plant” images or objects associated with each of your main points along the route in your mind. Then, when you’re ready to recite, you’ll “walk” (or “drive”, or “amble awkwardly”) along the path, noticing the objects along the way.

Here’s an example:

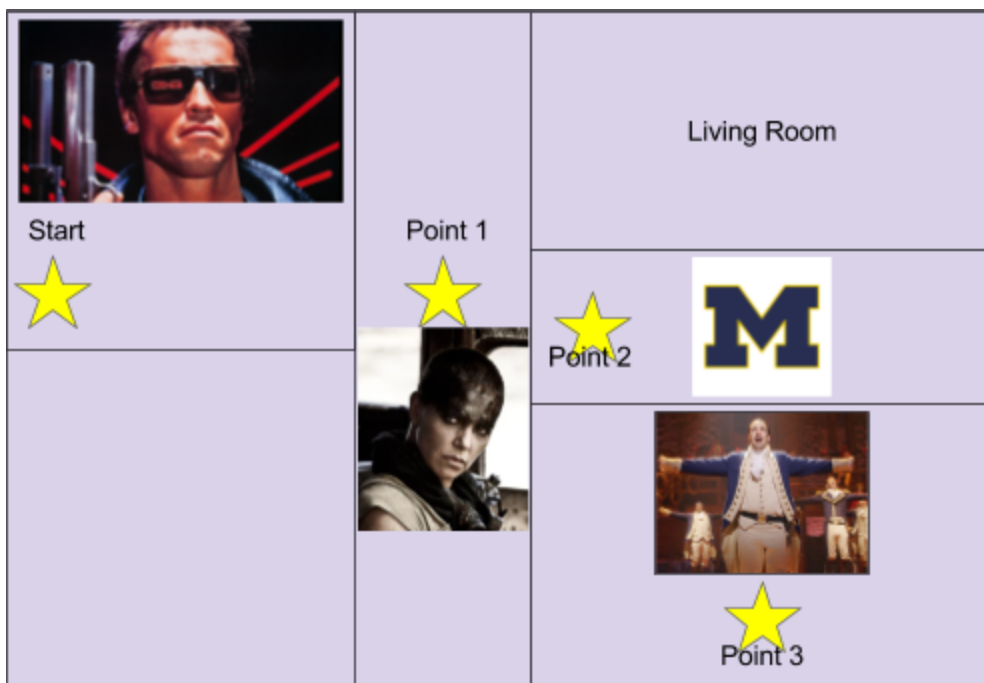
I’m using a part of “Citizenship in a Republic”, by Teddy Roosevelt (one of my personal favorites). The text is as follows (and the entire text is available [here](#)):

IT IS NOT THE CRITIC WHO COUNTS; NOT THE MAN WHO POINTS OUT HOW THE STRONG MAN STUMBLES, OR WHERE THE DOER OF DEEDS COULD HAVE DONE THEM BETTER. THE CREDIT BELONGS TO THE MAN WHO IS ACTUALLY IN THE ARENA, WHOSE FACE IS MARRED BY DUST AND SWEAT AND BLOOD; WHO STRIVES VALIANTLY; WHO ERRS, WHO COMES SHORT AGAIN AND AGAIN, BECAUSE THERE IS NO EFFORT WITHOUT ERROR AND SHORTCOMING; BUT WHO DOES ACTUALLY STRIVE TO DO THE DEEDS; WHO KNOWS GREAT ENTHUSIASMS, THE GREAT DEVOTIONS; WHO SPENDS HIMSELF IN A WORTHY CAUSE; WHO AT THE BEST KNOWS IN THE END THE TRIUMPH OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT, AND WHO AT THE WORST, IF HE FAILS, AT LEAST FAILS WHILE DARING GREATLY, SO THAT HIS PLACE SHALL NEVER BE WITH THOSE COLD AND TIMID SOULS WHO NEITHER KNOW VICTORY NOR DEFEAT.



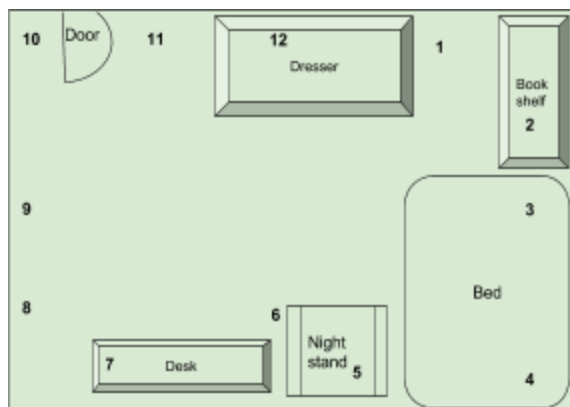
Here's a diagram of the ground floor of my house. I walk the same way to my office each morning, after pouring myself a cup of coffee. I walk through the hallway to peek in the bathroom mirror at the state of my hair before settling down at my desk. Try to pick a route you take all the time, one you're super familiar with and don't have to think much about. If I

were to "plant" the parts of the speech here, I might imagine Arnold Schwarzenegger bumping into my kitchen cabinets ("the strong man stumbles"), Furiosa driving a semi truck through my hallway ("whose face is marred with dust and sweat and blood"), a U of M linebacker sitting on my bathroom counter ("who errs, and comes short again and again"), and Alexander Hamilton, sitting in my office chair ("at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly"). When I'm ready to deliver the speech, I imagine myself standing in my kitchen, and as I work my way through each point, I see each funny image I left there before to remind me of what I'm supposed to say. The crazier, and simpler, the people or objects you put in your way in your head, the easier each point will be to remember.



- Roman Room
 - Similar to a Memory Palace, a Roman Room uses a single room that you already know to “plant” ideas in your mind. Imagine your bedroom--I’ll bet you could draw yourself a map of every important object in your room right now. If you’re standing at the door (or laying in bed, pick your orientation), label the parts of the room like you would a clock--12 is directly in front of you, 6 behind, with 3 on your right and 9 on your left. Now, beginning with 12, “plant” the parts of your speech clockwise around your bedroom. When you’re getting ready to perform, imagine yourself standing at the door (or lying in bed), and just look around at all the weird objects you left for yourself in your imagination. That should help trigger your brain as to which part of the speech you’re at.

Here’s an example:



Similar to the Method of Loci, the Roman Room uses the “planting” of strange objects or people in order to jog your memory. In this case though, I’m going to use a map of my bedroom to demonstrate: After I have a rough sketch of my room, I’m going to number the diagram like a clock, with 12 at the front and 6 at the back, 9 on my left and 3 on my right. Now, just like before, I might assign objects that trigger a connection to the speech to points in my

room. This might look like:

Number	Text	Object
12	the strong man stumbles	A pair of roller skates on top of my dresser
3	whose face is marred with dust and sweat and blood	A box of makeup remover wipes on my bookshelf
6	who errs, and comes short again and again	A paper covered in red ink on my nightstand

9	at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly	A parachute on the floor near the door.
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The objects you choose should have a connection for you between the object itself and the text it's supposed to represent. You may find it helpful to sketch it out to begin with, so you have something physical to relate to as you begin the process.

- Make a Map
 - Much like Dora the Explorer, you might find it helpful to build yourself a map from the introduction to your conclusion, marking important moments along the way. You may choose to write these in or draw them out. Refer to the text and the map, then just the map, then nothing--just think through the map in your mind.

FOR READ-WRITE LEARNERS

- Break it into chunks
 - I used this strategy a lot in high school and college. When you go to memorize, break up your speech into smaller sections--smaller than a paragraph but longer than a sentence or two. Try and reread and memorize each small section, then put them together. It might be helpful to take a copy of your script and cut out each section, then glue the section to an index card. On the back, write a word or two that will trigger you to remember what the section is about. If you use the index-card method, be sure to number them in order so you don't accidentally memorize the sections in the wrong order (Guilty).
- Read it before bed
 - Studies have shown that if we study before bed, our brain spends the night thinking over what we've learned. Before you've gone to sleep, but after you've finished Netflixing/Facebooking/Tumbling for the night, give your speech one final read (not a final skim, a final read).
- Make a list
 - I've found it very helpful to make a string of letters for each paragraph. The string is made up of the first letter of each word of the text, but does not contain the whole word. For example, if I were memorizing this text:

IT IS NOT THE CRITIC WHO COUNTS; NOT THE MAN WHO POINTS OUT HOW THE STRONG MAN STUMBLES, OR WHERE THE DOER OF DEEDS COULD HAVE DONE THEM BETTER. THE CREDIT BELONGS TO THE MAN WHO IS ACTUALLY IN THE ARENA, WHOSE FACE IS MARRED BY DUST AND SWEAT AND BLOOD; WHO STRIVES VALIANTLY; WHO ERRS,

WHO COMES SHORT AGAIN AND AGAIN, BECAUSE THERE IS NO EFFORT WITHOUT ERROR AND SHORTCOMING; BUT WHO DOES ACTUALLY STRIVE TO DO THE DEEDS; WHO KNOWS GREAT ENTHUSIASMS, THE GREAT DEVOTIONS; WHO SPENDS HIMSELF IN A WORTHY CAUSE; WHO AT THE BEST KNOWS IN THE END THE TRIUMPH OF HIGH ACHIEVEMENT, AND WHO AT THE WORST, IF HE FAILS, AT LEAST FAILS WHILE DARING GREATLY, SO THAT HIS PLACE SHALL NEVER BE WITH THOSE COLD AND TIMID SOULS WHO NEITHER KNOW VICTORY NOR DEFEAT.

I would only write these letters on a notecard:

lintcwc; ntmwpohtsms, owtdodchdtb. Tcbtmwiaita, wfimbdasab; wsv;
we, wcsaaa, btineweas; bwdastdtd; wkge, tgd; wshiawc; watbkitettoha,
awatw, ihf, alfwdg, sthpsnbwtcatswnkvod.

This method is very helpful because it forces you to put away your entire script. Also, it's portable (each paragraph fits on a notecard or so). It looks crazy, but I promise, it's very effective.

FOR AUDITORY LEARNERS

- Record yourself saying the script
 - This is a strategy I can personally attest to using, and it's one that always helped me internalize speeches quickly. Using your phone or laptop, record yourself reading the script (I find it helpful to record each paragraph separately, rather than one giant recording of the whole speech). Then, when you're walking through class or playing music in your car, or wherever, listen to yourself saying the speech. It's extra helpful to talk over the recording or to at least say the words to yourself as you do.
- Talk through your outline with someone else
 - Once you've got a handle on the speech, you might find it helpful to sit down with a friend (I've found that friends who are also memorizing things are usually the most willing; all others can usually be bribed with Starbucks) and just explain the parts of the speech to them. Start by explaining the parts of the intro, then the transition, then the first point, and so on.
- Read it super dramatically
 - One of my favorites, this one you should probably do alone--it tends to attract attention. Read through your script, exaggerating the emotion in every line. Even words like "however" and "attest" can be given extra

dramatic flair. If you choose this style, write down the emotion you chose for each line--it will help us have a conversation about gestures and vocal characteristics down the line.

FOR KINESTHETIC LEARNERS

- Find “odd” times to run your speech
 - Find points during your day when you’re doing mindless work (no, class time is not one of these times). Your walk home from school, while you’re cooking dinner, any kind of task which requires your hands but not much of your brain is time you could devote to memorizing. If you’re a fidgeter who has trouble staying focused, giving your hands something to do can make it easier for your brain to retain information.
- Attach each point to a dance you know well (Hokey Pokey, Macarena)
 - I’ve found the Hokey Pokey to be a great way to work on memorizing something. Give each paragraph a part of the dance--left foot for your introduction, right foot for your first point, left hand for your second point, etc. When you start memorizing your intro, stick your left foot out. When you go to conclude a point and transition, shake it all around.
- Read through it while walking
 - Find a dog or a treadmill, and take your show on the road! Much like running your speech at points during the day where your body is occupied but your brain is not, doing a repetitive motion like walking can help your brain retain information.
- Handwrite a copy of the paragraph, reading aloud as you do so
 - Again, this strategy works best if you break down the speech into smaller pieces. I say handwritten over typed because there is some evidence to suggest that handwriting involved a different section of our brain than typing does, and may be more helpful in forming memories of what you write.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I BLANK?



First, and most importantly, don’t panic. Seriously, don’t panic. It happens to everyone. If in the middle of a performance, you happen to lose your place, take a deep breath. If that doesn’t jog your memory, take

another deep breath. If that works, and you know where you're supposed to be, just keep going like nothing happened. If that second deep breath doesn't work, think about the next portion of your speech that you remember, and talk your way to that point. You'll end a little short on time, but it's alright. What you shouldn't do: a) assume your speech is over and just sit down, b) apologize for your performance, or c) fidget with your hands/hem and haw until you sort it out.

GO OUT! MEMORIZE! DO THE DANG THANG!