

How can I improve my memory?

Techniques to remember

Alex Jones: I've got a challenge for you. Ok ready? I would like to know if you can remember this sequence of numbers on the board. Here we are. All completely random and I'd love to see if you could memorise that sequence.

Ed Cooke: I'll give it a go, Alex.

Alex: Ed, time is ticking. Are you ready?

Ed: Yeah, I'm ready. I'll give it a go. 90, 12, 39, 12, 7, 3, 67, 24, 18, 8, 81, 62, 45, 39, 3, 24, 50, 15.

Alex: Wow!

Ed: Was that right?

Alex: That is incredible. Can you just talk me through how you managed to do that?

Ed: Yes, so to do this I was using the memory palace technique and a special system I have where every number I've learned a person who's the same as that number – and basically I come up with random associations. So like 90, is a friend of mine who thought he was a rapper, who was born in 1990. So I imagined him in a space where I grew up – just outside the front door – and the next one I had was 12, which is by the way Anne Boleyn, one of the six wives of Henry VIII. I don't know why but it was my first association with 12. So I had him chatting to Anne Boleyn, outside the front door. Then inside the front door, I had 39 who was my old headmaster from school and then 12 was Anne Boleyn again, so he was talking to Anne Boleyn. Then 7 is David Beckham. So David Beckham was talking to my mate Jay C, number 3. So I made this little story as we wound round the thing. And because people are much more interesting and memorable than numbers, by having the image of the person and putting the people into the story, you can actually remember loads of stuff really fast.

Alex: Because you did it incredibly fast in terms of thinking of people to link to those numbers...

Ed: Yes, well, I'm cheating really because I actually already have the people. The people are always the same. If you had to choose an image for 18, what would your first person be?

Alex: I think it would have to be my cat because she died at 18. Cheery!

Ed: Perfect! A direct association. Most people have an association for every number so you just do that, and then you've got your vocabulary and then you can make the stories.