

How can I improve my memory?

What is memory?

Memory is a funny thing. It's something we use every day, but we may not take time to necessarily think about it. If you're anything like me you may remember some things and forget others.

I find it really hard to remember my best friend's birthday but then I can remember long pieces of scripts!

In order to remember information, our brain goes through a number of processes. Firstly it needs to register information. So paying attention at this point is crucial. If we're unable to take the information in then it is unlikely that we're going to be able to remember it.

This is where our sensory memory comes in. It's activated by our senses of sight, hearing, taste, smell or touch.

Take these brandy snaps. They appeal to all my senses. Especially the taste!

But beware because your sensory memory lasts for less than a second. It's so brief, we're unconscious of it. It's literally gone in a snap.

I will need to do more than just register what I've experienced if I want to remember this.

It's crucial to encode the information held in our short-term memory in some way, so that it can then be transferred into our long-term memory.

Encoding helps us remember the brandy snaps by creating a more lasting impression of them in our minds.

We're now ready to use the memory. By actively recalling it, we make it stronger and help it bed down in our long-term memory. Consolidate.

The more times we repeat the memory, the stronger it becomes, and the easier it becomes to store in our long-term memory. Ready for us to re-use it later on.

It's a bit like saving it to the brain's hard drive. And once it's lodged there it's available to retrieve.

The different levels of memory each have their own particular way of working, but they all cooperate in the process of memorisation.

Long-term memory may last for the whole of your life. Although we often complain that it's difficult to learn new things, there is no limit to how much information we can store in our long-term memory.

No excuse then for forgetting my best friend's birthday!