



CHAPTER 6: MEMORY STRATEGIES: MNEMONIC DEVICES

In order to remember information, you first have to find it somewhere in your memory. To be successful in college you need to use active learning strategies that help you store information and retrieve it. Mnemonic devices can help you do that.

Mnemonics are techniques for remembering information that is otherwise difficult to recall. The idea behind using mnemonics is to encode complex information in a way that is much easier to remember. Two common types of mnemonic devices are acronyms and acrostics.

Acronyms

Acronyms are words made up of the first letters of other words. As a mnemonic device, acronyms help you remember the first letters of items in a list, which in turn helps you remember the list itself.

Examples

The following are examples of popular mnemonic acronyms:

HOMES	Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, Superior	Names of the Great Lakes
FACE	The letters of the treble clef notes in the spaces from bottom to top spells "FACE".	
ROY G. BIV	Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet	Colors of the spectrum
MRS GREN	Movement, Respiration, Sensitivity, Growth, Reproduction, Excretion, Nutrition	Common attributes of living things

Create Your Own Acronym

Now think of a few words you need to remember. This could be related to your studies, your work, or just a subject of interest.

Five steps to creating acronyms are* :

1. List the information you need to learn in meaningful phrases.
2. Circle or underline a keyword in each phrase.
3. Write down the first letter of each keyword.
4. Rearrange the letters into a memorable acronym.
5. Practice the association from the acronym to the keyword and then from the keyword to the meaningful phrase.

Acrostics

Acrostics are phrases made up of words beginning with the first letter of other words. As mnemonic devices, acrostics support recall by helping you remember the list of keywords.

Examples

The following are examples of popular mnemonic acrostics:

My Very Educated Mother Just Sent Us Nine Pizzas	Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto	Planets in order from the sun
Richard Of York Gave Battle in Vain	Red, Orange, Yellow, Green, Blue, Indigo, Violet	Colors of the spectrum
My Dear Aunt Sally	Multiple, Divide, Add, Subtract	Mathematical order of operations
We Just Like Rushmore	Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt	American Presidents on Mount Rushmore

* From Van Blerkom, D. L. (2008). *Taking charge of your learning*. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth.

Create Your Own Acrostic

Now think of a few words you need to remember. This could be related to your studies, your work, or just a subject of interest.

Five steps to creating acrostics are:

1. List meaningful phrases each on a separate line.
2. Circle or underline the first letter of each phrase.
3. Write the first letter of each keyword on a new line.
4. Create a sentence (an acrostic) from the first letters of each keyword.
5. Practice the association from the acrostic to the keywords.