

Retrieval Practice



Tom Sherrington and
Sara Stafford

What's the idea?

Memory is strengthened by retrieval practice.

What does it mean?

According to psychologists such as Robert and Elizabeth Bjork and Yana Weinstein (one of the Learning Scientists), our capacity to remember things in the long-term is strengthened by practising the process of retrieving information from our long-term memory into our working memory.

The more we practise remembering, the easier it is to do and the longer we can recall the information for. The less we do it, the more we forget. The effect of retrieval practice is stronger than re-reading or being told the same information repeatedly.

There are many forms of retrieval practice, depending on the material in hand. It can simply be mental rehearsal of factual knowledge, mental elaboration (where you explore connections between ideas) or practical drills and rehearsals that make the retrieval process more automatic.

What are the implications for teachers?

Learning does not miraculously 'sink in'. It's essential to use and teach retrieval methods routinely. Low-stakes quizzing,

practice routines, mental rehearsal methods and well-designed assessment regimes that support the accumulation of knowledge over time are powerful ways to help students 'practise remembering'.

Teach students to replace weak revision strategies – such as 'going over your notes' and highlighting – with other techniques such as self-quizzing and elaboration. Also make sure any abstract ideas are linked to specific examples; it is this combination that supports the development of better long-term memory.

TOP TIP / Develop efficient routines for punchy, regular low-stakes quizzing following a daily, weekly and monthly review pattern (as described by Barak Rosenshine – see below).

Want to know more?

The Learning Scientists website <http://www.learningscientists.org/downloadable-materials>

Willingham, D. Chapter 3: Why do students forget everything I say in *Why don't students like school* (2009) Jossey-Bass

Rosenshine, B *Principles of Instruction - Section 1 and 10: Daily, Weekly and Monthly Review*. American Educator 2012.

