

is actually important and useful. Only by doing so can the brain function efficiently. When it comes to practicing and repetition, the well-proven principle is that the intervals between activities can be brief at first, then grow longer over time. Likewise, there are advantages to connecting new material with things one has already memorized, since making connections is easier than starting from scratch.

Goals

Memorization techniques make possible the absorption of new material, i.e. they aim first at learning things by heart. The more solidly this first acquisition succeeds, the easier and more propitious the next step will be, whose goal is to turn vocabulary knowledge into a spontaneously available and deployable resource in communication. From a cognitive point of view, mnemonic techniques are a basic tool, but the experience of acquiring new knowledge is also of enormous importance emotionally and motivationally: it strengthens one's self-efficacy, one's trust in one's own abilities and one's optimism. With this in view, the following *Get Busy!* section begins with concrete suggestions that students can learn to apply themselves. We will present seven memorization techniques, carefully selected for their applicability in the class-room, along with additional tips for practicing them at home. All of them can thus be used outside as well as during class, e.g. while working on homework, alone or with study partners – parents, siblings, friends.

Get Busy! Activities for the Classroom and at Home

Connect Places and Contents!

Making actual or imaginary connections between places and contents, known as the *Loci Method*, is one of most ancient mnemonic devices we know of. It can be tried out in the classroom as follows: either in plenum or in small groups we choose a pathway on which we will learn. Along this pathway there are *stations* at which a portion of the material to be learned is presented and communally repeated, for example, at the door to the classroom. Then one proceeds to the next station and the next bit of content, and so on. At the end, the entire pathway can be traveled once again, such that the contents that *live* at each location are remembered and rehearsed. For many learners it can be



helpful to actually walk the pathway a second time, after which the various stations and their associated contents can be easily recalled. At home, the pathway might begin, for example, at the front door, where the first two or three vocabulary words are learned, and from there proceed to the refrigerator, where the next portion is learned, etc.

By means of this technique, the contents to be learned are portioned out and connected with particular physical locations. Of central importance, however, beyond the use of spatial information and the creation of a set sequence of stops along the pathway, is the movement itself: it plays an important role in retention (cf. below, on techniques of learning while walking and learning with mime, gesture and physical movement).

Make a Picture!

Drawings and sketches as well as mental images can also support the acquisition of knowledge contents. Visual information is enormously important and constantly present in our social lives. Somewhere between 60% and 90% of all the information coming to us over the course of a single day is either completely visual or has visual components. Pictures and illustrations are processed in the brain's visual system and can, as mental images, supplement linguistic information, for example in learning vocabulary, and thus can strengthen one's performance in retaining what has been learned. Of course, this hardly means that in every case, finished images have to be made available. Sometimes it is also possible to paint a picture in the mind's eye and to combine this with the learning material. This activates the learner – and as is well known, we learn best when we ourselves are active and thinking! Moreover, when learners make their own sketch in connection with the contents to be learned, the linguistic and visual information are supplemented by the traces left in the brain by the motor activity of drawing, painting, etc. This too can increase the chances of successful learning.

Turn It Into a Story!

Especially when dealing with isolated facts, such as a list of unrelated vocabulary, it can be difficult to feel confident about acquiring the new material, since from experience we know that apparently unrelated things are hard to process. Often, we quickly forget individual elements again – a frustrating experience that can really be a thorn in the side



of even the bravest Learning-HERO. The solution is to arrange the contents in such a way that they *bed-in* with each other and become connected: now the brain is happy to work with them. The most tried and true method for doing this is to transfer the knowledge contents into story form. With new vocabulary, for example, one tries spontaneously to imagine a situation and develop a story or at least a small sequence of actions in which all, or as many as possible, of the vocabulary words can be embedded. The hearing, telling and inventing of stories represents a kind of fundamental human need: from earliest childhood, we are surrounded by stories, and thus develop our own narrative skills. These can serve as a tool for learning. Stories are enormously important for the development of language.



Sort and Connect!

This technique takes up the idea of supporting the memorization process through visual representations, and like the story technique described above, it aims at forging links between isolated contents. By creating e.g. *graphic organizers*, we can organize learning contents and render their connections visible. New vocabulary, for instance, can be sorted by part of speech, by length, by subjective feeling of difficulty, or other aspects. The contents thus cease to be disconnected from each other: an intensive engagement with the material takes place, which sorts it into manageable portions. In short, with *sort and connect*, the contents are organized in a way that makes them easier to learn.



Organizational techniques such as this one are helpful not only because they divide the material into portions and reduce disconnectedness. One also, in the process of sorting and connecting, starts to recognize patterns and regularities. The brain is in many ways a pattern detector, seeking constantly and everywhere for patterns – not least of all in language. New information is scanned in terms of possible regularities. Where detected, these are then tested for their connectability to patterns already represented in the brain. The *sort and connect* technique facilitates this process and thus makes the absorption of new information easier.

Write It Out – Preferably by Hand!

If implemented correctly, writing can be a particularly effective learning technique. Many people use it intuitively and notice that they are able to remember things especially well when they write them down. But how does one use writing correctly, and what, if any, are the pitfalls to be avoided?

One thing is clear: mechanical copying, where one's thoughts wander all over the place and the task is a burden mostly imposed by others, has little positive effect, and can even be de-motivating. Much more effective for absorbing new material is targeted writing that the learner implements as much as possible herself. Such writing becomes an important occasion to engage with the contents on one's own terms. This happens, for example, when the material is not written down willy-nilly but rather with a certain structure. When the task is learning new vocabulary, one might – similar to the *sort and connect* technique described above – first create an overview or a memo. With a memo, the learner determines beforehand how many words can be written down. Grasping the material through writing then becomes a valuable *aide-mémoire* instead of an annoying obligation! For the remaining vocabulary, symbols, smileys or sketches can be used. The goal is to be able in the end, with the help of the memo, to recall all of the new vocabulary. “Studies have shown that developing one's own representations [...] leads to better results than repeating pre-given contents or re-reading [...]” (Sambanis & Walter 2022: 66). An important reason for this is that, in writing by hand, the motor functions are activated, i.e. corresponding sequences of movement are integrated into the learning process. If one is able to activate the contents to be memorized, that is, to engage with them mentally and to remain focused on them, then the brain's motor, visual and, whenever possible, auditory functions (speaking and hearing oneself speak), together with the language centers, can contribute to strengthening the memory.

Writing by hand, it is worth noting, leads to a pattern of activation in the brain involving twelve different zones, including the centers of movement and those that are responsible for language processing. To put it simply, when writing by hand, the words appear where they are written. In this way the visual impressions are immediately connected with the associated motor and cognitive sequences.



Typing is rather different, and in significant ways. One *writes* on a keyboard, but nothing appears there. What has been *written* appears elsewhere, on a display or monitor. Unlike writing with pen on paper, there is a disjunction between the eyes and the fingers: they are not at work in the same place or in the same direction. When writing by hand, the gaze holds to the direction of writing – both in observing the hand’s movements (when typing the gaze jumps around from letter to letter) and in perceiving what has been written. Accordingly, the brain is activated differently when one is typing than when one is writing by hand: “As studies using brain-imaging methods have shown, pressing a key [...] activates the brain similarly to the way beating a drum does” (ibid.: 67). Although writing by hand has greater potential as a mnemonic technique than typing, writing on a digital device is not in itself bad. When learners make use of an app, for example, which requires them to type and retype the new words and phrases, they generally obtain better results than learners do who rely exclusively on the age-old but (in terms of middle-term and long-term retention) ineffective and even frustrating technique of simply reading and re-reading.

Learn on Foot!



With or without a set path, walking has great potential, and even the ancient Greeks studied and philosophized on foot. Walking activates us, stimulates the blood-flow and oxygenation, and helps us reach a level of wakefulness that allows us to process new material. That walking also has positive effects on overall health is already reason enough, especially for those of us who spend a lot of time seated, to give this technique a serious try. But learning while walking can also be conducive to processing memory contents. Actors and other professionals who have to memorize large swaths of text tend to rely intuitively on this technique, and often with good results. How can this be explained? In fact, the beneficial effects in terms of learning are due not only to the stimulating effect of movement, but also to the metrical patterning of thinking and repeating in rhythm with one’s steps. Simple, reliable rhythms, such as that produced by walking, have proven effective with a variety of language-related activities – even in the context of speech therapy. Absorbing new vocabulary to the rhythm of one’s own steps can be done alone or with a learning partner.

Count on Face, Gesture, Movement!

Gestures, facial expressions, postures and bodily movements can help map new contents onto the memory in such a way that they are well-anchored and easily recalled. Used as a technique of memorization, one combines a new vocabulary word with a gesture or pose that is somehow related to it, for example, the German word *Glühbirne* and the gesture of screwing in a lightbulb. As for concepts that cannot be represented concretely, one considers briefly in what contexts the word typically appears and how it does so – that is, with what sort of emotional expression in the voice, face or posture. The search for an appropriate movement leads to an engagement with the contents and thus contributes in an immediate way to the process of learning. Ideally, the vocabulary is spoken multiple times aloud instead of silently *in one's head*: as we pointed out above in our discussion of *private speech*, repeating things out loud leads to a higher rate of retention than silent repetition. During each repetition, the associated movement should also be repeated. A wide range of studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of combining movement and content with spoken repetition (Sambanis & Walter 2020), not only for young learners, but to the same degree for other age groups, including teenagers and (young) adults (Böttger & Sambanis 2021, Schilitz 2021).

Movement enriches the linguistic dimension with complementary motor and sensory stimulation, such that the learning contents become livelier and more impactful. This leads to an increase in the intensity of the representations in the brain, and thus to better retention, counteracting forgetfulness even over longer periods of time.

Bonus Tip for Home

Generations of school kids have wished with all their hearts that they could learn while sleeping. In fact, sleep contributes significantly to learning, above all when it comes to consolidating, sorting and erasing. In this sense, a sufficient amount of restful sleep is an indispensable ingredient in learning. Periods of rest are vital to both body and mind, and for this reason one should view with skepticism offers that promise the possibility of learning, for example, through headphones while asleep.



Manual for Bedside Learning

Learn in small chunks
→ activate your brain
→ repeat
→ turn off the lights
→ sleep

By contrast, what can function well is the memorization or repetition of a modest portion of material immediately before going to sleep. If, as a last memory before sleep, one can manage to take a small learning episode along, then the chances are good that the brain will engage with these fresh impressions and, in the course of the post-processing phase of sleep, will ensure that the contents are anchored through reactivation. In this sense, sleep can be used as an additional aid to memorization. But remember: it functions best if the focus remains on a modest portion of content.

Show Your Feelings!



Young people in particular often find it difficult not only to allow themselves to feel emotions but also to interpret the emotions they feel. The causes for this lie in the reorganization of the teenage brain.

Aims and Procedures

By foregrounding the facial expression of emotions, this activity promotes the ability to accept one's own emotions as well as to interpret the emotions of others. At the same time, if deployed in the foreign-language classroom, the activity can offer a useful variation in methodology. For example, if one wishes to practice the question/answer schema *Do you like? – Yes, I do!/No, I don't!*, the learners can be required to answer the question directed at them first using facial expression, posture or gesture, and then in the next step using language: *Do you like kittens? – a delighted facial expression that says: Kittens are so sweet! – Yes, I do!*

The activity can also be used in remote teaching and learning, provided the learners are using the camera function on their devices. As a transition between the facial clue and the linguistic answer to the question, the other students can first express the answer they believe is the correct one based on their interpretation of the facial expression. From a grammatical point of view, guessing the answer on the basis of the expressive hint also allows the students to practice using the third person: *Yes, she does!*

Show your feelings thus allows on the one hand for the repetition of specific linguistic structures without monotony. On the other hand, the activity motivates the learners – many or all of them – to speak. Studies investigating the links between academic success and PsyCap have shown convincingly that learners who commit themselves more fully to participating in class also have better chances of reaching a high level of PsyCap. This in turn acts beneficially on learning and on educational success.

The activity can be adapted in language class for the expansion of vocabulary. Through acting and guessing, the ability to name various emotions using adjectives (sad, happy, disgusted, surprised, bored, etc.) can be foregrounded. A learner draws an adjective-card, acts the word out, and the class tries to guess what the word is. At the end of the session, and in the spirit of combining and valuing linguistic resources, several of the adjectives used can be compared with their analogs in other languages, e.g. family languages or other foreign languages taught in school.

The Thumbs-Up Card

This activity offers a fun way to express praise and other positive messages. In essence it is an updated version of what in Germany were once called *Fleißkärtchen*. These were in fact small cards (*Kärtchen*) that were still used in German elementary schools up to about 50 years ago to reward obedience and (as the name *Fleiß* suggests) diligence. (A similarly old-fashioned expression in English might be something like *brownie points* or *merit badges* – both of which, like *Fleißkärtchen*, connote a rather conservative view of child-rearing.) Of course, the point in rewarding obedience and diligence was to ensure that these behaviors continue. The aim is different today, but the basic principle of using cards to signal positive feedback remains valid.

Aims and Procedures

The aim of the *thumbs-up card* is to strengthen the HERO components. By offering a small moment of happiness in everyday life, it communicates to the recipient that their efforts have not gone unnoticed. Under the search term *proud of you ticket* or *proud of you note*, one can find numerous templates online in English, some of them available for free download.



One can also design one's own template to be appropriate for the intended group of recipients, and use it again and again. It is special when the teacher speaks in their own voice, as in our example below (*This week, I noticed that you...*), and the list of praiseworthy actions can also be adapted for other caregivers and other contexts, such as home. This pleasant effect is increased if the teacher or caregiver signs the card personally. Children in elementary school and early secondary school are generally delighted to receive such cards, and many even save them. Things can be different in puberty, of course, when some may find such things childish. Even then, however, praise should not be spared when something is praiseworthy! And sometimes one must look very closely in order to see whether adolescents are actually making an effort. With teenagers it is especially important that the caregiver remains in conversation and not simply pass by in silence. Otherwise, the threat of disconnection becomes real.

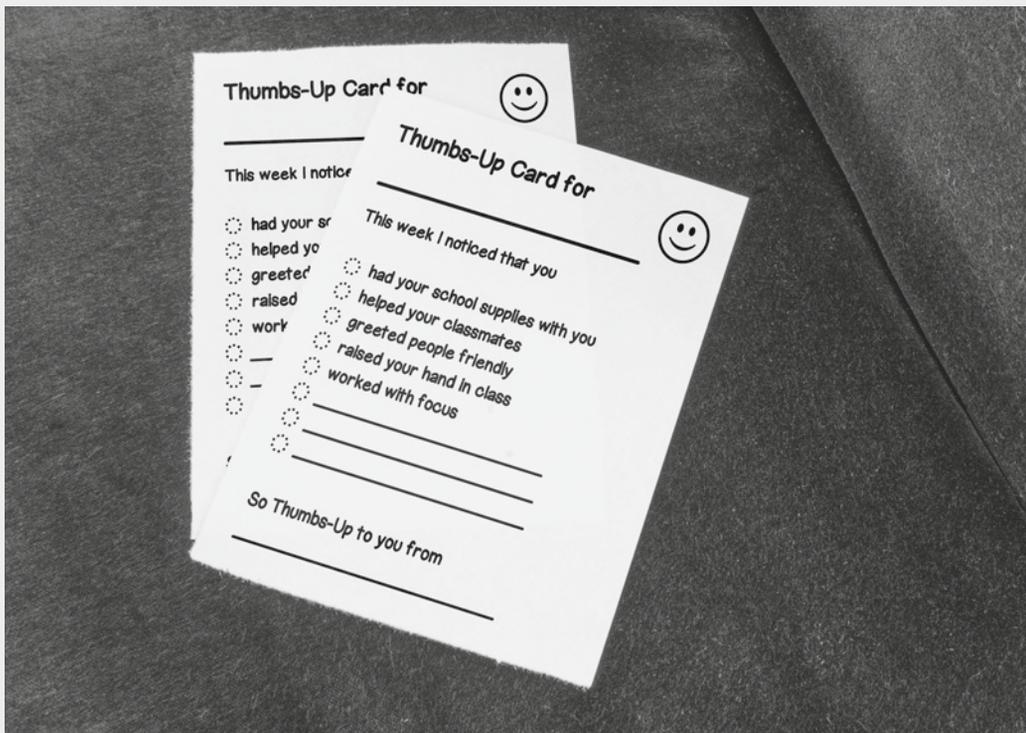


Fig. 18: Model for a Thumbs-Up Card

In foreign language class the *thumbs-up card* can of course be written in the target language. Note that the empty lines offer space for individually formulated compliments. One should also take care in the classroom that no child comes away empty-handed; this applies also to families with more than one child. Moreover, receiving a *thumbs-up card* ought to remain something special and should under no circumstances be used manipulatively.

The idea for the *thumbs-up card* came from an education student at the Freie Universität Berlin, who presented a *proud of you ticket* in a seminar and led a discussion thereafter. This shows that an engagement with language teaching and learning that is inspired by Positive Psychology can be of interest not only to caregivers and practicing teachers but also to future teachers. A corresponding emphasis in seminars is met with interest on the part of students, and it motivates them to engage both scientifically and practically with the approaches of Positive Psychology. The following impulse also derives from a suggestion made by education students.

The Elf on the Shelf

This prompt is based on a more recent Christmas tradition with roots in the United States.

Aims and Procedures

The elf on the shelf offers amusing impulses for speaking and writing in the context of language learning, and combines these with the naming of strengths, with appreciation, mindfulness, gratitude, hope, optimism and resilience.

During the time leading up to Christmas, one of Santa's elves appears in the form of a small figurine or doll to accompany the children through the weeks prior to the holiday. As Santa's helper, the elf has the job of keeping an eye on things and keeping Santa informed. On the first day, the elf sits on the shelf at home or in the classroom; after that he appears in a different place every day. The children are excited and eager to find out what new hiding place the elf has taken up each time. Unusual places are always the favorites.



There are numerous English-language children's books and rhymes on the elf-on-the-shelf theme, which can easily be used in English language class. Particularly outside the United States, the discovery of an unfamiliar Christmas tradition in this active way can be a source of pleasure for children. Other Christmas customs from other cultures can be brought in, as well as other winter holidays. This can serve as an exciting theme both at home and in the classroom, something that stimulates curiosity and openness and thus promotes cultural and intercultural learning and the discovery of other traditions and languages.

Using the Christmas elf in foreign language class in elementary or middle school – it can of course be adapted for any foreign language – offers the possibility of combining an activity in attentiveness (perceiving where other people, in this case the elf, are located) with linguistic practice in searching for the elf's new hiding place in the morning (*Where is he today? Who has found him? Where? On top of the closet, behind the plant, on the teacher's chair* – question/answer patterns, prepositional phrases).

In the spirit of Positive Psychology, the elf's pre-Christmas visit can also be used as an occasion to reflect upon the things one is thankful for. These are written down and collected e.g. in a cotton sack or purse, so that the elf can take this with him at the end of his stay. Or, instead of messages of gratitude, the children could write down honest appreciations of other children in the class or of family members and friends, e.g. *Tim saw that I forgot my lunch and so he shared his with me. That was so nice and also delicious!* or *My little brother Mert drew a picture especially for me. It made me very happy.* The grownups (teachers, parents, grandparents as well as siblings) can participate too, contributing positive messages that name strengths and express appreciation. In this way, one can make sure that a positive message for every child is in the collection.

If *the elf on the shelf* is used in a foreign language class where the children are not yet able to write their messages in the target language, one can offer assistance in the form of sample sentences from which the learners then choose. Otherwise, the messages can be written in the children's native language. With appreciative messages, the children are naturally quite curious to know what has been written about them. This is good, because only when the messages are displayed or read out loud do they learn what positive aspects and strengths others see in them. We recommend saving the collection

until shortly before the holiday (meaning: shortly before the elf's departure), when it can be shared in the group. If the messages have been written in a language other than the target language, the teacher can affirm them in the target language and embellish them in an amicable way, thus making a connection between the languages.

Start the School-Day Upright and Strong

Many school days involve special challenges: an in-class presentation, a performance, a test – and often a certain amount of tension is palpable. Of course, it is not wrong to focus one's mind and gather one's energies before an approaching challenge, but excessive excitement and uncertainty – which can cause a loss of appetite in some children, even nausea and vomiting – are clearly detrimental. Many parents are good at speaking reassuringly to their children and showing empathy in such situations, but as a rule this does not do so much to remove the fear and tension.

Aims and Procedures

The activity makes use of our knowledge of the cooperation of the body and mind, and addresses felt tension through posture. Here it is important to assume an upright posture together, and to pay attention briefly to the inhalation, thus redirecting the circling thoughts toward one's own body and one's own strengths. Ideally, one would address the child or young person with a few sentences such as those given below and do the activities oneself – a small investment of time that will pay off significantly. The activity might be introduced as follows:

Let's both stand up straight and breathe deeply through the nose, then blow the air out through the mouth.

Let's open our shoulders as well, pulling them a bit toward the back, so that they don't droop. Now there's even more room for our breath. Inhale through the nose...

That feels good, doesn't it! We can make ourselves even taller if we pull the tops of our heads up toward the ceiling. Then you really notice how there's more room in the spine. Now again a deep breath...



If desired, the activity can be further elaborated, for example by noticing whether the feet are well rooted in the ground and offer a strong base, and whether, like a tree, the energy is flowing up through the feet and into the entire body – and of course also into the brain.

Above all it is important that one accompanies the child through the process of assuming an upright posture, and that one initiates and models the deep breathing, since otherwise the breath will typically become blocked and shallow. The activity closes with an explicit affirmation of the gathered energy and confidence with which the child can now start her day. The activity is appropriate for young people as well (and adults!) and can easily be integrated into the personal repertoire of coping strategies.

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