

MNEMONIC DEVICES

Mnemonic devices are memory “tricks” which can profoundly increase your ability to recall everything from speeches to grocery lists. There are four basic categories of mnemonic devices:

(1) **NEW WORDS:** Acronyms are words created by the first letter of a series of words. EXAMPLE: NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Aministration), scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus), laser (light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation), and Roy G. Biv (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet – the colors of the visible spectrum).

(2) **CREATIVE SENTENCES:** Acrostics are sentences created by words that begin with the first letters of a series of words. EXAMPLE: “Every good by does fine.” (the musical notes associated with the lines of the treble clef staff – E, G, B, D, F). “On old Olympus’ towering top, a Fin and German viewed some hops.” (for medical students, the cranial nerves – olfactory, optic, oculomotor, trochlear, trigeminal, abducens, facial, auditory, glossopharyngeal, vagus, spinal accessory, and hypoglossal).

(3) **RYHMES AND SONGS:** Advertising executives spend billions of dollars a year on commercials that will burn their message in your memory. Rhymes have been used for centuries to teach children basic facts. EXAMPLE: “In fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” “King Henry the Eighth to six wives he was wedded: one died, one survived, two divorced, two beheaded.” “Thirty days hath September, April June ...”

(4) **LOCI SYSTEM:** The loci system is an old one. Use it to create visual associations with locations you already know (around your house or apartment, or on or within your body). Unusual associations are the easiest to remember. EXAMPLE: a shopping list containing orange juice, broccoli, coffee, and paper towels – visualize the frozen orange juice can sticking out of your nose, the broccoli as your hair, the coffee hanging from your earlobe, and the paper towels balanced on your toe.

(Condensed from: *Becoming a Master Student*, by David B. Ellis)