



Unit 18 Memories

Before you read

Think about these questions. What kinds of experiences do you remember best? Did they happen recently or a long time ago?

Read the article

Memory

Memories . . . everyone has his or her own special ones. They are part of what makes each person unique. But how does human memory work? There are two basic kinds of memory: short-term memory and long-term memory. Both are very important.

Short-term memory is the ability to remember things that happened in the recent past, such as where you put your keys. Short-term memory puts information that you experience with your senses in a special "storage place" in your brain. This means that everything you see, hear, touch, or experience enters almost instantly (in a quarter of a second) into your short-term memory.

Short-term memory allows you to immediately understand and react to things that happen in your daily life. The average person can store about seven pieces of information in the short-term memory "storage place." These seven pieces of information are constantly changing. As new pieces of information enter short-term memory, the brain makes room for them by forgetting the information that is already there. People who are stressed out, sick, or old find it harder to keep information in their short-term memory than other people do.

The ability to remember events from the distant past is called long-term memory. Long-term memories are stronger than short-term memories, and they last throughout a person's life. They help people to define "who they are"—what their families were like, what they did when they were children, and so on.

Every piece of information goes through short-term memory, but only a few of these pieces become long-term memories. Why is this so? Nobody really knows, but scientists do understand a couple of things about memory. You are more likely to remember something for a long time if it means something special to you. And you are also more likely to remember it if you repeat it many times. So, if you want to put a piece of information in your long-term memory, try to "practice" it in as many different ways as possible: say it out loud, write or draw it, or touch it!



Check your comprehension

Correct the mistake in each sentence.

1. There are ^{two} ~~three~~ basic kinds of memory.
2. Long-term memory puts information that you experience with your senses in a special "storage place" in your brain.
3. The seven pieces of information in short-term memory never change.
4. Long-term memories are weaker than short-term memories.
5. Many pieces of information become long-term memories.
6. You are less likely to remember a piece of information if you repeat it many times.

Build your reading skills: Comparing and contrasting

Read the article again. Compare and contrast short-term and long-term memory. Write *short-term* or *long-term* in each blank.

1. Short term memory is the ability to remember things from the recent past.
_____ memory is the ability to remember events from the distant past.
2. _____ memory helps people define "who they are." _____ memory allows people to immediately understand and react to things that happen in their daily life.
3. _____ memories stay the same. _____ memories are constantly changing.
4. Old people often have problems with _____ memory. But _____ memory lasts throughout a person's life.