

Mnemonic Device

A method of reorganizing information to make the information easier to remember.

Mnemonic devices are used to reorganize information so that the information is simpler and more meaningful and, therefore, more easily remembered. They involve the use of imagery or words in specific ways to link unfamiliar information to familiar information that resides in memory. Mnemonic devices that involve imagery are strongest when they are vivid, peculiar, and exaggerated in size or quantity. Mnemonic devices that involve words are strongest when the words are familiar and clearly related. Mnemonic devices are useful for remembering names of new things, large amounts of rote information, and sequences of events or procedures. A few examples of mnemonic devices include:¹

First-Letter—The first letter of items to be recalled are used to form the first letters in a meaningful phrase, or combined to form an acronym. For example, *Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally* to assist in the recall of the arithmetic order of operations: Parentheses, Exponents, Multiplication, Division, Addition, Subtraction; or *AIDS* as a simple means of referring to and remembering Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome.

Keyword—A word that is similar to, or a subset of, a word or phrase that is linked to a familiar bridging image to aid in recall. For example, the insurance company AFLAC makes its company name more memorable by reinforcing the similarity of the pronunciation of AFLAC and the quack of the duck. The duck in the advertising is the bridging image.

Rhyme—One or more words in a phrase are linked to other words in the phrase through rhyming schemes to aid in recall. For example, *red touches yellow kill a fellow* is a popular mnemonic to distinguish the venomous coral snake from the nonvenomous king snake.

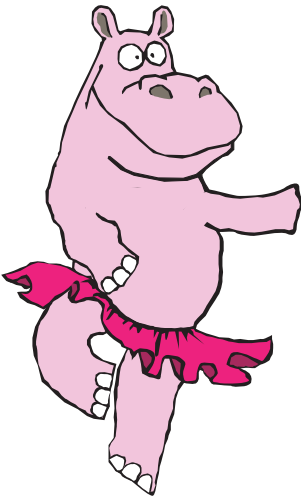
Feature-Name—A word that is related to one or more features of something that is linked to a familiar bridging image to aid in recall. For example, the rounded shape of the Volkswagen Beetle is a key feature of its biological namesake, which serves as the bridging image.

Consider mnemonic devices when developing corporate and product identities, slogans and logos for advertising campaigns, instructional materials dealing with rote information and complex procedures, and other contexts in which ease of recall is critical to success. Use vivid and concrete imagery and words that leverage familiar and related concepts.

See also Chunking, Serial Position Effects, and von Restorff Effect.

¹ The seminal contemporary work on mnemonics is *The Art of Memory* by Frances A. Yates, University of Chicago Press, 1974.

Clever use of mnemonic devices can dramatically influence recall. These logos employ various combinations of mnemonic devices to make them more memorable.



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