

Visit With the Utays

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School Psychology and Education Specialists



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Another Memory Key: Add Structure to Lists

In the first stanza of his poem "Forgetfulness," Hart Crane (1899-1932) described the opposite of a good memory:

Forgetfulness is like a song

That, freed from beat and measure, wanders.

*Forgetfulness is like a bird whose wings are reconciled,
Outspread and motionless, -*

A bird that coasts the wind unwearyingly.

Feeling like that bird "that coasts the wind unwearyingly" actually sounds quite pleasant, but not for the student struggling on a test to cage the answer to, "List the continents" or, "Which US presidents served just prior to, during, and just after WWII?" When it comes to memorizing lists, we can all empathize with Hart Crane, who ended the above poem with, "I can remember much forgetfulness."

We work with a lot of children who had a very difficult time remembering lists for tests. However, once they understood and applied the principle, "The brain loves structure," they found it much easier to show the teacher during the test what they knew when studying the night before. The exact structure is less important than the fact that some structure exists. For example, simply putting the continents in alphabetical order makes them easier to memorize. Subdividing them by hemispheres or oceans-in-common are other examples.

Whichever structure is applied to the list however, it is very important to not vary that structure each time it is reviewed. That's the key- create and then stick with a structure that becomes the glue that holds the list together in memory.

Improving memory is clearly important for factual information memorized by students as well as looking back to remember and learn from our personal pasts. To quote Time Magazine, "Memory is the personal journalism of the soul." But, if structuring lists and other approaches to helping your child strengthen his or her memory are not making a substantial difference in achievement or grades, as always, consider community resources. Total Learning Centers continue to offer an effective program consisting of a series of challenging brain building exercises to build up the "muscles" responsible for short-term, working, and long-term memory.

For more information about this or any other topic related to your child's success, including professional assessment of strengths and needs, contact Total Learning Centers at 724-940-1090 (Wexford, Fox Chapel, and Murrysville areas).

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