

## Help Your Audience Remember

**Brief:** Speech content can be made easier for an audience to remember by applying a number of time-tested principles.

**Learning Objective:** Understand how to use principles to help audience members remember speech content.

**Key Terms:**

- **Memory:** The ability of an organism to record information about things or events with the facility of recalling them later at will.
- **Mnemonic:** Anything (especially something in verbal form) used to help remember something.
- **Spatial orientation:** Items organized by mentally associating them with specific physical locations.

## Make Messages Easy to Remember

Memory refers to the process by which information is encoded, stored, and retrieved. From an information processing perspective, there are three main stages in the formation and retrieval of memory:

1. The encoding or registration stage allows information from the outside world to reach our senses in the form of chemical or physical stimuli.
2. The storage stage creates a permanent record of the encoded information.
3. The retrieval, recall, or recollection stage calls back the stored information in response to some cue for use in a process or activity.

You can help make the content of your speech easier for your audience to remember by applying a number of time-tested principles.

## Principles for Supporting Memory

### ***Visual and Spatial Orientation***

One of the oldest memory aids presented in classical rhetoric, visual and spatial orientation allows items to be remembered by mentally associating them with specific physical locations. For example, you can create a mental image of a building or a city for your audience and then associate different ideas or themes with each spatial area. You can then walk the audience through the areas as you discuss each theme in the associated location.

## ***Limiting Sets***

You can break up long series into manageable smaller sets. When chunking them down, you want to group similar items together. Because the newest research suggests that short-term memory capacity is four to five items, your audience will remember the information you share if you break up long lists into meaningful, smaller groupings.

## ***Association***

Your audience will find it easier to remember if you make associations between new ideas and concepts to familiar ideas and concepts. For this to work, you'll want to make sure the association you create is meaningful to the members of the audience and will fit into their mental framework. If you compare a disruption in government services to the effects of a hurricane, it's helpful if the audience lives in an area that has a history of hurricanes.



## ***Affect***

You can also create a strong emotional connection for the audience by mentally painting a vivid picture for the audience. You might describe an image of something that is extremely beautiful or ugly in the minds of your audience. A concept that is salient, bizarre, shocking, or simply unusual will be more easily remembered.

## ***Repetition***

Repeating important ideas can help the audience remember. To avoid the tedium of repeating the same idea word for word, include internal summaries in which you repeat what you want the audience to remember in a new and more concise way.

## ***Mnemonics***

Mnemonics are often verbal, such as very short poems or special words used to help with memorization (e.g., lists). If you want the audience to remember the list “dog, envelope, thirteen, yarn, window,” you could create a link system, such as a story about a dog stuck in an envelope, mailed to an unlucky black cat playing with yarn by the window. Alternatively, you could ask your audience to visualize a dog inside a giant envelope and an unlucky black cat (or whatever reminds them of the number thirteen) eating a huge envelope.

## From Concept to Action

Create your own mnemonic to remember a set of five or six words, drawn randomly from a dictionary or book index. Select the words and write them down. Then, create a fun mnemonic to help remember them. Repeat the mnemonic out loud a couple of times. Then, put the piece of paper away where you can't see it (but remember where you put it!). Wait a day or two and try to recall the mnemonic and its associated words. Check your memory by retrieving the piece of paper. Did your mnemonic work?

### OER IMAGE SOURCES:

"Key West Florida Hurricane Dennis Storm Wind Windy." Pixabay. <https://pixabay.com/photos/key-west-florida-hurricane-dennis-86025>. Accessed 02 April 2019. [CC0]

### OER TEXT SOURCES:

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