

HOW TO REMEMBER NEW VOCABULARY WITHOUT FORGETTING IT THE NEXT DAY

13 unique, science-backed methods

+ A FREE GAME-MAKING
RESOURCE

USE THESE CARDS TO:

1. Slip into plastic sleeves at stations for quick practice without extra prep
2. Add to language learning centers or pull-out ESL groups
3. Use as exit ticket challenges—"Pick a strategy and show how you'd remember this word!"
4. Tape to binder covers or inside folders as go-to reference tools
5. Create a "strategy of the week" spotlight in your classroom
6. Hand out during parent-teacher conferences to show how to support vocab at home
7. Translate into students' native language for bilingual support materials
8. Include in your sub folder—they're ready-made, low-prep, high-impact
9. Use during PD workshops or PLC meetings to share ELL-friendly strategies with colleagues
10. Build a student vocabulary notebook section dedicated to "How I remember this word"
11. Kick off group work or jigsaw activities with one technique per group to apply
12. Post in your Google Classroom or LMS for hybrid/online reinforcement
13. Turn them into task cards for review games like Scoot, Kahoot warmups, or Quiz-Quiz-Trade
14. Offer as prizes or pick-your-tool choices in vocabulary games or competitions
15. Vocabulary Review or warm-up prompts
16. Mini-lessons for tutors or para support
17. Take-home strategy cards for family literacy nights
18. Fast-finisher folders binders
19. Visual reminders taped to student desks

THE FORGETTING CURVE (EBBINGHAUS)

Why Words Are Forgotten:

Your brain naturally forgets new information to conserve energy, especially if it's not reviewed or used. Most people lose up to 70% of what they learn within 24 hours unless they actively reinforce it.

FUN FACT

You don't forget because you're bad at English—you forget because your brain loves to save energy and get rid of 'unused' information.

PRO TIP

After learning a new word, test yourself immediately with a question to activate recall. For example:

- Question: "What's a group of fish called?" (Answer: **A school!**).
- If you're the learner, make the word stick by teaching it to someone else. For instance:
- "Did you know a group of fish is called **a school**? It's like they're swimming to class every day!"

CONTEXTUAL ENCODING

Why Words Are Forgotten:

Words learned in isolation have no “anchor” in your brain. Your memory thrives on connections, like a web. Without relatable contexts, words just float away.

FUN FACT

Your brain loves stories, not flashcards! Context gives words a ‘home’ where they feel safe and stick.

PRO TIP

Learn words through relatable sentences. For example:

- Instead of memorizing apple, say: “I like apples, but I don’t like bananas.”
- Pair verbs with personal context: “I can eat apples, but I can’t eat spicy food.” This makes learning relevant, emotional, and easier to recall.

STATE-DEPENDENT LEARNING

Why Words Are Forgotten:

Your physical and emotional state during learning affects memory. If your state while recalling doesn't match your state while learning, retrieval can fail.

FUN FACT

If driving stresses you out, learning English while driving probably won't work. But if you enjoy your morning coffee or a warm bath, that's an ideal time to review vocabulary.

PRO TIP

For example:

- Learn the word **sip** while drinking coffee: "The first sip of coffee in the morning is the best."

By pairing a soothing activity with learning, your brain builds stronger memory ties.

THE MEMORY PALACE (METHOD OF LOCI)

Why Words Are Forgotten:

*Your brain remembers places
better than random facts.*

FUN FACT

Your brain loves to ‘travel.’
By giving each word a
place, you create a mental
vacation where memory
flows easily!

PRO TIP

Do you like taking daily walks?

You could use them as a learning
moment. For example:

- The leaves are **falling**. The snow
is **glistening**.

See something you don’t know the
word for in English? Look it up! I bet
next time you see it, you’ll be able
to recall it in English.

TESTING AS A TOOL (A.HUBERMAN)

Why Words Are Forgotten:

It's natural for the brain to quickly forget new information unless you use it right away. But passively reviewing isn't enough to make it stick.

FUN FACT

Testing yourself soon after learning—even if you get it wrong—actually helps you remember better because it forces your brain to work harder.

PRO TIP

If you've just learned **owl**, ask yourself: "What do you call a bird that's active at night?" If you can't recall it right away, that's fine! Even the effort of trying to remember helps your brain retain it longer. Repeat this process throughout the day for long-term retention.

THE SERIAL POSITION EFFECT

Why Words Are Forgotten:

Words at the beginning and end of your learning session are remembered better, while those in the middle often get lost in the shuffle.

FUN FACT

Your brain loves drama—beginnings and endings are the stars, while the middle gets forgotten! Shuffling the order prevents “middle-word syndrome” and boosts retention.

PRO TIP

Rearrange your study order to give every word a chance to shine. For example:

- If you're learning the names of medical symptoms, and one of the most difficult words is backache, start with it once, then move it to the end next time.

MULTISENSORY INTEGRATION

Why Words Are Forgotten:

When you only use one sense to learn a word, your brain doesn't get enough "anchors" to hold onto it. More sensory input = stronger connections.

Adding sights, sounds, smells, or tastes activates multiple areas of the brain, making the memory stronger.

FUN FACT

Your brain is a sensory sponge—it remembers better when you hear, see, smell, or even taste what you're learning!

PRO TIP

Engage more senses while learning:

- For sight and smell: Learning the word **chamomile**, imagine its smell and texture.
- For taste: Learn the idiom **end on a sour note**, by imagining as if you were taking a bite of a juicy lemon.

THE ZEIGARNIK EFFECT

Why Words Are Forgotten:

Your brain naturally prioritizes unfinished tasks over completed ones because unresolved information keeps your mind actively working to “close the loop.” If something feels “complete,” your brain is more likely to let it go.

FUN FACT

Your brain remembers unfinished tasks better than completed ones because it naturally seeks closure.

PRO TIP

Use partial definitions. For example:

- Learn **scorching** by writing it on a sticky note or vocab list at school, “Scorching is very...” and complete it later: “...hot!”

This trick keeps your brain engaged and eager to revisit and remember.

INTERLEAVING EFFECT

Why Words Are Forgotten:

Learning similar words together (e.g., all clothing items or just adjectives) confuses your brain. It struggles to differentiate when the material feels too repetitive or predictable.

FUN FACT

Your brain loves variety. Switching between categories keeps your brain engaged and builds richer mental networks, making recall easier and faster.

PRO TIP

Combine different vocabulary categories and link them to descriptive words or actions. For example:

- Clothing Items: **dress**, etc.
- Adjectives and colors: The **blue** dress looks **beautiful**.

THE FEYNMAN TECHNIQUE

Why Words Are Forgotten:

You may think you've learned a word, but if you can't explain it to someone else, your brain hasn't fully processed or stored the information. Passive learning doesn't test true understanding.

If you can't teach it to your grandma, you don't really know it!

FUN FACT

The Feynman Technique, named after Nobel Prize-winning physicist, is one of the most effective methods to master a new concept by teaching it to others.

After learning a new word or phrase, pretend you're teaching it to a friend (or even your pet!).

PRO TIP

- The word **grumpy** means someone is in a bad mood, like when my cat wants food and I'm late!

The simpler you can explain it, the better you've mastered the word.

PERSONAL CONNECTION EFFECT

Why Words Are Forgotten:

Words that don't feel relevant to your life or emotions are harder to remember. Your brain prioritizes connections to your experiences.

Your brain remembers what feels important to you! Make it personal, and it'll stick!

FUN FACT

Research shows that linking new information to your own experiences can boost retention by up to 70%. A word tied to a personal story or emotion becomes unforgettable.

Relate new vocabulary to your own life:

PRO TIP

- For ***impulse buying***, think: “I avoid impulse buying by...”
- Adding personal context gives words emotional weight, making them harder to forget.

PASSIVE-TO-ACTIVE VOCABULARY SHIFT

Why Words Are Forgotten:

This happens due to the divide between active memory (words we can recall quickly) and passive memory (words we recognize but don't use). Words often stay in passive memory without active recall, and eventually the connection to active memory fades.

FUN FACT

Words stored in passive vocabulary need active engagement to move into usable memory.

Word search games engage with passive vocabulary by visually presenting words learners know but may not use frequently.

PRO TIP

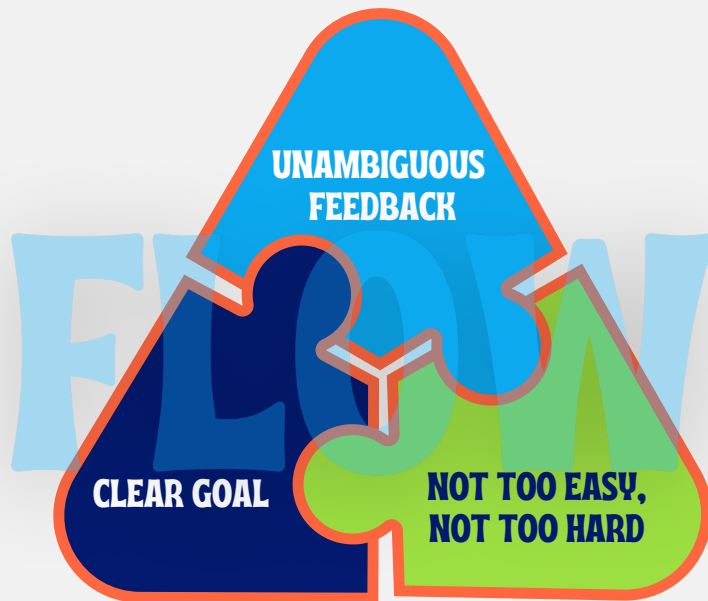
Find words like information or **delegation** in the puzzle, then immediately use each word in a sentence:

- “The manager assigned the task through **delegation**.”

This combination of recognition and usage strengthens both memory and practical recall.

THE FLOW EFFECT

based on the Experience Sampling Method by M. Csíkszentmihályi, a psychologist who discovered the concept of flow, a state where you're fully immersed in an activity.



FUN FACT

In flow, you lose track of time and perform at your best. To achieve flow, tasks must have clear goals, real-time feedback, and just the right level of difficulty—not too easy, not too hard.

Game designers work hard to make experiences captivating, easy to feel in the zone even in the face of failure.

PRO TIP

1. Clear Goals: Choose 5-10 new words per session.
2. Immediate Feedback: Use tools like flashcards, apps, or games that correct mistakes instantly.
3. Goldilocks Challenge: Mix easier words (cat, run) with harder ones (enthusiastic, maintain) to stay engaged.



[Start making your games](#)