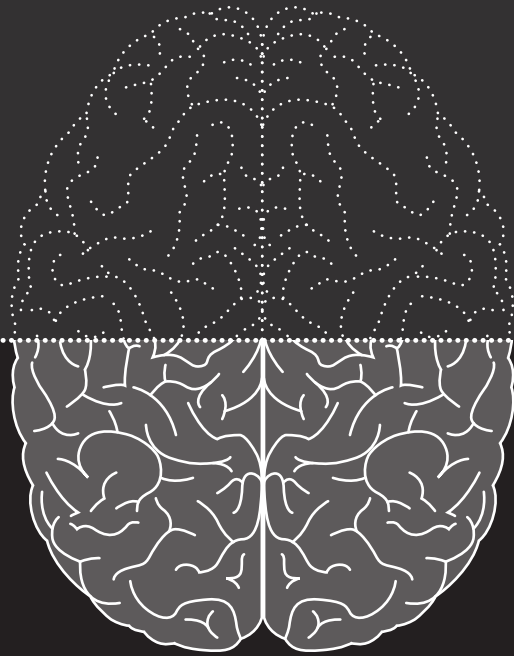


WHY WE
FORGET



AND HOW TO
REMEMBER

Unless you have a photographic memory, you likely find it hard to remember everything you learn, even an hour or two after you learn it. Why? Research about how we remember and forget gives us a clue.

HOW QUICKLY WE FORGET

19th century psychologist [Hermann Ebbinghaus](#) created the “Forgetting Curve” after studying how quickly he learned, then forgot, a series of three-letter trigrams. Here’s what he discovered:



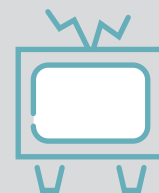
In the time it takes to make and drink a cup of coffee, you’ll forget 42% of what you learned.

42%

20 MIN

56%

In about the time it takes to watch your favorite TV show, you’ll forget 56% of what you learned.



1 HOUR



During the course of a normal workday, you’ll forget 64% of what you learned.

64%

9 HOURS

25%

In less than a week, you’ll only remember 25% of what you learned.



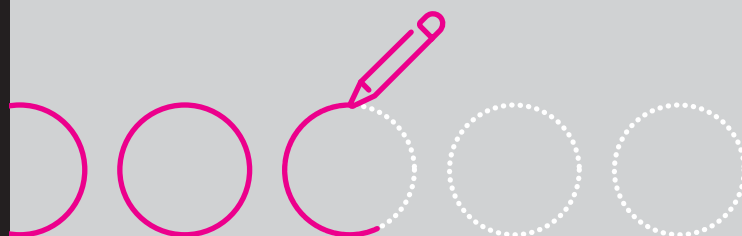
LESS THAN
A WEEK

WHY WE FORGET

Our brains are hardwired to recall important facts. The process that determines what you remember and what you forget makes recalling every single detail nearly impossible.

MEMORY DECAY

When you learn something, a new memory “trace” is created. But if you don’t rehearse and repeat what you’ve learned, memories decay and fade.

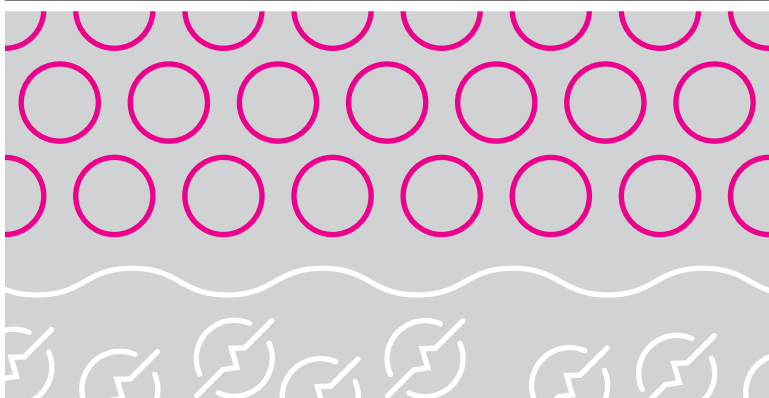
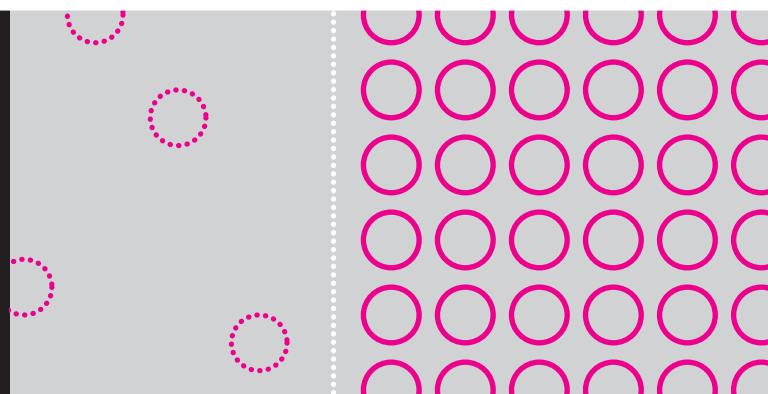


INTERFERENCE

Old memories and new information compete with and distort the formation of new memories, making it difficult to remember what’s new.

FAILURE TO STORE

Some information is never transferred from short-term memory to long-term memory—especially details that are likely to be unimportant.



MEMORY REPRESSION

Memories of traumatic or disturbing events can be suppressed as a means of coping with difficult situations.

HOW TO REMEMBER

In the century since Ebbinghaus discovered the Forgetting Curve, scientists have suggested several things you can do to reverse its effects:

SLEEP

During slow-wave and REM sleep, memories are transferred from temporary storage in the hippocampus to more permanent memory around the cortex.

NOVELTY

Learning in creative or unfamiliar circumstances, or in new ways, is more memorable because it triggers additional activity in the hippocampus.

STRESS

Like novelty, stressful or dangerous situations can make events more memorable. Stress helps imprint these “flashbulb memories” into our minds for easy recall.

SPACED REPETITION

Reviewing what you learn strengthens the memory of it. Every additional review renews the learning, slows the forgetting curve, and makes the information more permanent in your memory.

BEST METHOD

HOW TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SPACED REPETITION

It was Ebbinghaus who first identified the phenomenon of spaced repetition for improving memory. Since then, numerous studies have affirmed its powerful effects. Here's how to use spaced repetition to improve your learning:

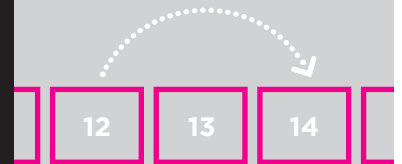
QUICK REVIEW

Within a few hours of first learning something new, read your notes, adding thoughts or summaries of the notes every few lines. If you don't have notes, reread the text or, if you're learning online vs. a classroom, re-watch portions of the course, taking notes this time.



SKIP A DAY

While it may be tempting to repeat the process as soon as you can, an important part of spaced repetition is the spacing. The first review should be quick. Each subsequent review should take place at a longer interval than the previous one.



REVIEW THE MATERIAL AGAIN

Review everything you've learned, not just what you've forgotten. For example, if you learned a new skill from online training, watch the course again, adding to your notes to make them more complete.



TAKE A TEST

Testing your memory improves retention by 20-50%. If your learning platform offers assessments or quizzes, take them to test your memory and make note of what you've missed for further review.



REPEAT SEVERAL TIMES

The next review should take place 3-5 days later. Then review again roughly 6-10 days after that. Add another test for better retention. After 5-6 reviews at longer intervals, what you've learned will be a permanent part of your memory.



SOURCES

“New e-Learning Measurements: The Challenges and Advantages Facing Your Business”, Larry Israelite, PhD, Pluralsight Webinar, 2015.

“Memory: A Contribution to Experimental Psychology”, Hermann Ebbinghaus, 1885.

“Forgetting”, Saul McLeod, Simply Psychology, 2008.

“The Psychology and Neuroscience of Forgetting”, John T. Wixted, Annual Reviews, November 3, 2003.

PRESENTED BY



PLURALSIGHT

Make the most of your learning journey with on-demand access to our library of expert-led training and thousands of assessments. Watch (and re-watch) courses and test your knowledge to learn, review and remember.