



Unit 3 Total recall

Cross-curricular – Science

- 1 Read what these people say about their memories. Who are you most like? Write a few lines about your memory to add to the comments.

B My memory is absolutely hopeless. Unless I concentrate really hard on something, I forget it within minutes. I forget people's birthdays, what homework I need to do – I even forget to watch a TV programme I've been looking forward to. How crazy is that? And as for exams where you have to memorise things – you can forget that!

C I suppose my memory is quite average really for my age group. I remember what I want to remember and things that interest me, but otherwise ... I can remember stuff for an exam but then a week later don't ask me about it – it's gone!

A I've got a pretty good memory for lists – you know, like lists of words, shopping lists and things like that – also phone numbers, I can remember those easily. But sometimes I forget the strangest things – like where I've put my keys or what time I've arranged to meet someone.

D I'm lucky in that I have what they call a 'photographic memory'. I can just visualise any page I've seen and recall exactly what's on it. Great for exams! Mind you, people tend to think that everything I achieve is down to my great memory. And that's not always fair.

- 2 Read the article and answer the questions.

Are we losing our marbles?

Three elderly women are being given a memory test. The psychologist asks the first woman, 'What is four times four?' '358,' comes the reply. The psychologist shakes his head, and turns to the second woman: 'Now you try. What is four times four?' 'December,' replies the second woman. The psychologist then asks the third woman, 'Your turn. What's four times four?' 'Sixteen,' she replies. 'That's right!' says the psychologist. 'How did you work it out?' 'Easy,' she says, 'just take away 358 from December.'

Our brain is the most amazing organ in our body, developing new pathways and compensating for a myriad of problems as we grow and change throughout our lives.

Memorising is just one of the many functions that we rely on to operate effectively.

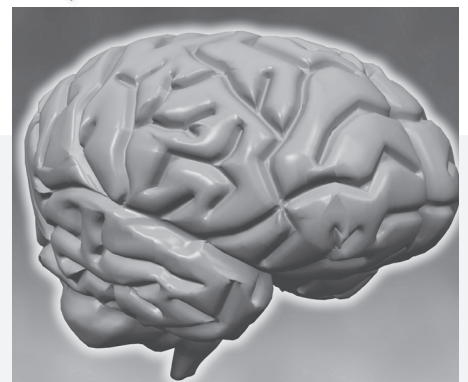
How often do we use mental association to remind us of important facts in history, or the name of someone we need to remember at an important meeting? However, nowadays we are relying more and more on facts being

stored for us in electronic form. Some people say that our memories are just not exercised as much today as they used to be.

For example, we don't need to remember phone numbers because we have them stored on our mobiles, and email addresses are a similar case in point – automatically remembered by our computer software. It's noticeable that many schoolchildren no longer recite their multiplication tables as they used to, since pocket and on-screen calculators are much more accepted now.

An important recently-published book on memory called *Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*, by Joshua Foer, analyses what's happened to our memorising techniques and what we need to do to develop ways of enhancing our brain's ability to remember names, faces, numbers, places – all things which can make us more engaged with the outside world.

Foer talks about a process which is known as 'elaborative encoding', which



involves translating information into visual pictures so that you can remember it more easily. For example, if you want to remember a list of groceries, try to visualise them in a strange and therefore memorable way. So flour, butter, milk and eggs could be remembered as a sequence, such as someone being in miniature, jumping into a bowl of flour and becoming white, then sitting on a block of butter and getting sticky, swimming in milk to get clean and then carefully relaxing on a pile of eggs to dry in the sun.

We are not, however, just lazily not bothering to use our memory to recall information, but using it to remember ways of getting that information, like how to use websites and phone applications. Put another way, if we can't remember the data, we can quickly remember how to get it.

- 1 Explain the joke in the first paragraph in your own words.

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- 2 Summarise the main points of the article in 100 words.

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- 3 Imagine you had to remember to buy the following things. How would you use 'elaborative coding' to make sure you didn't forget them?

- chicken
- bread
- tomatoes
- shampoo
- magazine
- dog food

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