

Spaced Retrieval Practice



Here at The Learning Center, we endorse spaced retrieval practice for any course that has exams (multiple choice, essay, short answer, and/or problem-based).

Retrieval Practice

Retrieval practice is attempting to recall something you learned without looking. When you learn something new either by attending a lecture, reading a book, or watching a video you will quickly forget it. To remember the information, you need to **practice remembering it**.

There are not really people with good memories and people with bad memories. If we apply effective memory practices, all of us can be good at remembering! Even those viewed as having excellent memories apply these basic principles to their approach to remembering

- Trying to solve a problem from memory without notes or the textbook is retrieval practice. Do as much as you can without looking. Do as much as you can before checking.
- It's best to try to remember the information in your own words.
- Let yourself forget a little before trying to retrieve. There is something important about forgetting and then trying to remember that helps us form lasting memories.

As a rule of thumb, **you want to practice in the way you will be tested**. You can't pass a driving test simply by reading a book about the rules of the road. You need to get in the car and drive. Similarly, if you are going to be tested by writing essays, you want to practice writing essays. If you are going to be tested with a multiple-choice exam, you want to practice by answering multiple choice questions. If you need to solve problems, then you should practice solving problems.

To practice retrieval, **put your notes and other materials away and try to remember without any prompts**. As we say above, **forgetting is part of the learning process**. You will forget and that is normal! Every attempt at retrieval will strengthen your memory.

How can you practice retrieval?

- Draw concept maps on a white board or write on a piece of paper.
- Fill in blank charts and then check your answers with an answer-key.
- Answer questions out loud with a study partner.
- If you don't have a study partner, ask yourself questions and answer them by writing answers or speaking the answers out loud.
- Use flash cards or a flash card app (e.g., Quizlet or Anki).
- Solve practice exam questions (cover up the answers if you have them!).
- Use practice questions at the end of the chapter. Make sure to mix them up so you don't know exactly which questions go with which chapters.
- Turn learning objectives into questions and use these questions as prompts (write down the answer or say the answer out loud).
- Turn headings in textbooks or on power point slides into questions and answer without looking.

Spacing

Practicing retrieval is the first step on the road to academic success. The second step is to think about timing. You wouldn't eat all your required calories, vitamins, and liquids for the week all in one day, would you? There is no way that your body could properly absorb everything if you did it this way. Likewise, if you cram all your study practice into a short window (even if you do it well) you are unlikely to remember a lot of it for future endeavors.

Think of it this way – engaging in 12 hours of study time spread out over two weeks vs. doing it all in one day will give you much better results for the same amount of time and effort. Spacing out your study is hands down more likely to lead to durable memories. This becomes particularly important if you are going to take a future course that will build on what you are learning in the present.

Putting spacing together with retrieval equals *spaced retrieval practice*. Spaced retrieval practice is your ticket to doing well in your courses no matter what the subject area. An Academic Success Coach can help you adapt and apply spaced retrieval practice.

If you need help with any of the above – previewing, taking notes in class, reading, retrieval practice – make an appointment with one of our Academic Success Coaches. We are here to help you!