

09 Interval Reviewing

This document explains Interval Reviewing. I assume you've understood and perhaps tried all five mnemonic techniques described in previous documents. To review, they are: my favourite, the Journey method, which pairs well with Linking stories; and for lists, dates, and long numbers, the three numerical systems: the Shape technique (using number shapes for 1-10), the Rhyming technique (based on a childhood nursery rhyme for 1-20), and the Major System (using consonant sounds for numbers up to thousands).

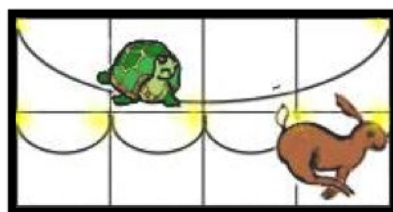
Long-term memory stores events or facts from more than a few minutes ago, but not all memories are equally strong. For example, most people easily recall that London is England's capital, but other details fade without reminders. Mnemonic techniques help by prompting and reinforcing these memories through brain-friendly connections, not just repetition.

Over time, unused knowledge, such as that learned at senior school, fades. I use reading, writing, and arithmetic daily, so they stick, but other subjects, like history, have mostly slipped away—except for quirky facts like the 1832 Reform Act and “Rotten Boroughs.” Cramming before exams didn't help long-term retention.

To retain information effectively, use Interval Reviewing (or Spaced Repetition). Unlike rote repetition, which is like scattering needles in a haystack, Interval Reviewing involves scheduled revisiting of material. Studies, like those by 19th-century psychologist Hermann Ebbinghaus, show we remember best what's studied at the start, end, or is unusual. His “forgetting curve” shows that most forgetting happens within the first 20 minutes to an hour unless you review strategically. To do this, you need to follow a schedule of spaced reviewing, often called Spaced Repetition.

Spaced Repetition

Spaced repetition, introduced by Paul Pimsleur in a 1967 paper, is a learning technique where you review material at specific intervals to reinforce memory just before you might forget it. Unlike repetitive cramming, it's efficient, like watering a plant only when it needs it. Pimsleur's intervals start at 5 seconds, 25 seconds, 2 minutes, 10 minutes, 1 hour, 5 hours, 1 day, 5 days, 25 days, 4 months, and 2 years. This means early reviews are frequent, but they taper off significantly, so by the time you're studying for a 3-year degree, you can retain years' worth of knowledge without last-minute cramming. Adjust intervals based on your needs—start with a 5- or 10-minute review, and if recall is weak, shorten the gap. For example, study for 20 minutes, review at 10 minutes, then 1 hour, 1 day, 1 week, 1 month, and so on. Even if you forget, Ebbinghaus showed relearning is faster, but spaced repetition helps you avoid forgetting in the first place.



Breaking up your study time into shorter sessions has another key benefit: you're more likely to remember material from the start and end of each session. The middle part often gets fuzzy. By dividing a long study period into shorter blocks with brief breaks, you create more 'beginnings' and

'endings,' which are easier to recall than if you study for hours straight with just one start and finish. I'm repeating this because it's crucial—short, focused sessions work better. Keep breaks short: stand up, take deep breaths, drink water, or walk around—not go and watch Eastenders.

This document doesn't include exercises, just my advice to try this spaced review method to retain what you've learned. In my next podcast, I'll cover the best study techniques, how to create a file for spaced repetition, and include a sample spreadsheet. I'll also discuss mind mapping. So, as always, use it or lose it!