

01 The Journey

This is a document to accompany my podcast Remember Word4Word, which explains how to master techniques that will enable you to memorise information on any subject you wish.

The title Remember Word4Word is because, in addition to memory techniques, I developed my own system for memorizing scripts and have been teaching line learning to speakers and actors for many years.

So, if you want to learn to memorise continue and if you are an actor, follow the advice of [Spencer Tracy](#) *know your lines and don't bump into the furniture*.

The first episode covers the most important memory technique of all, and it is the easiest to learn. The technique is called [loci](#), and it has nothing to do with a Norse god; it is the plural of locus, meaning location, spot, or place.

The history of this technique is more than two and a half thousand years old and was created by a poet called [Simonides](#). He was attending a banquet in ancient Greece and he was unexpectedly called away and so he left the hall.

A sudden earthquake demolished the building and rendered all the guests at the feast unrecognisable. Friends and relations were in despair, as they could not recognise their loved ones among the dead.

Simonides came to the rescue as he was able to remember exactly who was there and where every unfortunate guest had sat, so the bodies could be identified.

He was lucky to escape certain death and so are we as we might never have such a graphic picture to remind us of the technique loci.

So, who can benefit from spending a few moments learning this technique? Well, here's another Greek story to tell you. It is the myth of the [Sphinx](#). She was a monster who positioned herself outside the city of Thebes and stopped passers-by to ask them a riddle.

If the unfortunate travellers failed to answer correctly – she would eat them.

The riddle was what creature has four feet in the morning, two feet in the afternoon, and three feet at night?

One day, Oedipus turned up and he answered, "A man because he crawls on all fours as a baby, walks on two as an adult, but has a walking cane when old".

Now you are not likely to meet such a monster, but the answer Man does apply because everyone, whether a child, an adult or a senior, can understand and use this technique.

When you exercise your brain in this way, there are countless benefits and yes, anyone, whatever their age can do this, and that includes me, and I'm the one with the walking stick.

All you need for successful memorisation is imagination.

[Sir Francis Bacon](#) said that 'Knowledge is Power' but [Albert Einstein](#), one of the greatest and most influential physicists of all time, believed that 'Imagination is more important than knowledge'. Einstein imagined he was chasing after a beam of light, and that thought experiment led to the theory of relativity.

Now you may not turn out to be a genius but by using the following techniques you will exercise your imagination and gaining knowledge will be a major spinoff.

Imagination involves visualisation and if you believe that you can't visualise just think of your front door.

Is it white, black, blue, or green? Whatever colour it is, you did not see in your mind the words white, black, blue, or green, you saw your front door and its colour. You visualised it.

To demonstrate how easily loci can work for you, we will try a simple shopping list of 10 items and call it your first journey.

Without even knowing you, I know that you can accomplish this journey successfully because I know that if you have been out socialising and you wake up in the night with a desperate need for the bathroom, you will have no trouble finding it. Also, the next morning, you will be able to stagger to the kitchen for that first cup of coffee.

So, your first journey is where you live and the items you want to remember to buy are bananas, washing-up liquid, bread, orange juice, marmalade, eggs, bacon, shoe polish, potatoes, and toothpaste.

I have a point in using these specific items, but if you wish, feel free to compose your own shopping list for this exercise.

Turn off any distractions, such as the television or music and definitely your phone. You will need your brain to be focused, with all your attention on the images you are about to create.

This is your first journey. It is a similar technique to [The Roman Room](#) but I prefer to use [Journeys](#). This is because you must imagine a room to begin with, but your journeys will always be places where you have physically been, and you need all your creative imagination for the information that you want to recall.

Begin this first journey in your bedroom and choose a focal point, a [loci](#) to place the first item on your shopping list: Bananas

Close your eyes and imagine that you are in bed and your bedroom is filled with huge bananas - begin to eat one if you like. Wade through the bananas to the wardrobe. Inside the wardrobe, nestling among your clothes is a huge bottle of washing-up liquid, it covers everything in soapy goo. Put out your finger and touch it.

In this visualisation, you have added exaggeration, action, and touch to your picture, and taste, and smell if you have eaten the banana. All good aids to memory.

The BED and WARDROBE are the first two loci or focal points. The third is the BATH (or SHOWER): In your imagination, walk to the bathroom and in the bath or shower is a huge loaf of bread – it is a bit soggy around the edges – touch it.

The fourth is the WASHBASIN: Turn to the washbasin, and it is filled with an enormous orange. Take out the orange, turn on the tap, and it gushes out orange juice instead of water. Fill up a glass and drink it.

The fifth is the LOO: Turn and look at the loo. There is a large jar of sticky marmalade balanced on the seat. You don't want to sit on that!

Leave the bathroom and walk to the kitchen. Look at the STOVE, number 6: it is covered with dozens of broken eggs sliding down the front and onto the floor. Step in them – and slide a bit - yuck!

7 TABLE: Look at the table (or your counter if you do not have a table). It is completely covered with large, greasy slices of bacon.

Go to 8 the KITCHEN SINK to wash away the grease and stickiness from the eggs and bacon. The sink is filled with black shoe polish. You get it on your hands when you try to turn on the tap.

Go into your sitting room (or sitting area) and look at 9 the COUCH: someone comes up and empties a sack of potatoes on it.

Clear a space to sit on the couch and look at 10 the TELEVISION. A large tube of toothpaste is balanced on the top and the screen is obscured by a large stripe of toothpaste.

That is your list. Now to recall it.

Relax, close your eyes, and repeat the journey starting in your bedroom. You should see images of all the items that you need to buy at the store as you make your way through your home.

I hope that you feel happy when you realise that you have remembered your shopping list. I feel confident that you have been successful, as I have taught this to hundreds of people, and I cannot recall a single failure. Don't worry if you find that you have missed an item - just go back in your mind and make the picture stronger, adding elements of exaggeration, movement, sound, and humour.

You will remember that I mentioned that I chose some of the items for this shopping list for a purpose. Notice how often I have used action and touch, and exaggeration. All elements that will help you remember the scene you are creating.

Moreover, the brain looks for patterns, links and associations, so I put eggs followed by bacon, and I dumped a load of potatoes on the couch - couch potato.

We also remember the unusual or unique. Shoe polish is not something you would buy on a weekly shop, in fact, my shoe polish is years old, and it is pretty unique to keep marmalade in the bathroom balanced on the loo – that is, unless you are Paddington Bear.

Of course, for a longer list you can leave your house, walk to the station, catch a train, a bus, an aeroplane and go on holiday, to your place of work or anywhere in the world you choose – it's your journey.

Another creative way to use your journey is to attach it to things that you can associate with it. I once taught a law student, and we placed everything he needed to know about [torts](#) in [York](#), because he knew the city well and there was a favourite tearoom there that was famous for its fruit tarts. When he came to take the exam, he knew that every visual clue to an answer on torts needed to be set in York. The tearoom is called [Betty's](#) and it serves the most wonderful cakes and buns. There is also a Betty's in Harrogate and Leeds too - there are times when I miss "God's Own County".

Once you have mastered your shopping list, try it out with one of your own, and in the next episode, I will reinforce that first journey by using it to learn the [7 wonders of the ancient world](#).

Further episodes will teach the [linking](#) technique and three numerical techniques. Using the latter, you will easily be able to remember lists, dates, and long numbers. For those of you interested in history, dates and those interested in maths or science, pi, prime numbers and the periodic table. If you have a literary bent or are an actor, I will cover learning scripts, which is also useful if you need to learn a speech. Other subjects will be names and faces and memorising a deck of cards. In further episodes, I will suggest the ideal study methods and the best way to review what you have learned so that it is never lost but locked into your long-term memory.

Finally, Use it or Lose it. Remember you are not just adding to your general knowledge you are creating new pathways in your brain and the more you exercise your imagination, the more your creativity will flow. If that doesn't convince you to try this technique, this final thought may: Brain scans taken [of cab drivers](#) learning The Knowledge show that the hippocampus, which is where long-term memories are stored, actually expands over the period they spend memorising the streets of London. Not many people know that!