A Few Points About Memory

People have 3 kinds of memory: sensory memory (which is stored for only a few seconds), short-term memory (which allows you to carry on a conversation and complete the tasks at hand), and long-term memory (which lasts a lifetime—once it’s activated).

Anything you remember for more than a few minutes is stored in long-term memory. Once it’s in there, it stays there, but getting it in requires time, organization and repetition. Then, retrieving the information requires connecting the new information to things you already know, grouping information so it is organized and easier to find—for example, grouping everything that happened in a particular year or finding a way to make a word or sentence out of the first letters of related terms. A prime example of this is the way biologists are taught to remember the system for classifying species: A silly sentence—“Kings play chess on fat girls’ stomachs”—reminds them of Kingdom, Phylum, Class, Order, Family, Genus, Species. Such sentences and word-gimmicks are also called mnemonics.

Another point to consider is your learning style. Learning, of course, like memory involves putting information and skills in and then retrieving the input when it’s needed. You haven’t really mastered the material unless you can use it, recall it, and act on it. Your preferred learning style is visual, auditory, or kinesthetic (hands-on).

If you are a visual learner, in most situations, you tend to remember visual experience more vividly than auditory or physical experience. So when you study, you need to emphasize visual clues—like color.
and shape, organize information into visual formats and generally activate your optic nerve. Visual learners even sometimes just remember what a page looks like in order to recall what’s on it.

Similarly, auditory learners need to emphasize sound: speech (their own and other people’s), rhythms, even high and low pitches.

Recording and replaying lectures is more likely to work for an auditory learner than for visual or kinesthetic learners. Kinesthetic learners need to participate in the learning process with their bodies. This learning style is sometimes called “hands-on.” If they can’t build or draw the subject matter, they can organize it with blocks or shoot baskets while they are mastering vocabulary. Sometimes just walking around the room or associating gestures with ideas will facilitate learning for them.
Finally, some experts include a learning style called **reading / writing**.

These people simply prefer to read. Probably their verbal intelligence is strong. Perhaps, read/write learners combine auditory and visual strengths—since language has both visual and auditory components. In any case, these students thrive in philosophy or history classes with extensive texts—and essay tests.

**Multimodal: Your own learning style** probably combines more than one of these modes and varies a bit depending on what kind of skill you are learning. According to the V.A.R.K. site (for Visual, Auditory, Read/Write and Kinesthetic), more than half of us combine several modes for optimal learning. No one can learn to ride a bike from a book! Or learn to paint by listening to a lecture! When you learn to use a new software program you may read the manual, but when you learn art history, drawing may help you more than the book does, or you may need to study with friends.

**Discover your style:** A quick test for your preferred learning style is available FREE on the V.A.R.K. web site ([www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp](http://www.vark-learn.com/english/index.asp)). Click on “Questionnaire” to access the test. Then, explore the site to receive more tips on learning styles and your education.