

Mnemonic Strategies: Keyword Method

Est. Time: 90 Minutes


Objective

Understand that mnemonic strategies are highly effective for helping students retain and recall information.

Overview

For many students with learning disabilities, retaining and recalling information is often a difficult task. As research has demonstrated, one of the best ways to help students to overcome this challenge is by teaching them mnemonic strategies, sometimes referred to as memory-enhancing strategies. Of all the mnemonic strategies, the **keyword method** is the most researched, and it is proven to be highly effective for students with disabilities.

The keyword method is flexible and can be used in a variety of content areas. Students recall information by making an association between the keyword and a related sentence, image, or interactive picture to remember new information (e.g., English and foreign language vocabulary; scientific terms and classification; people, places, and events in social studies or history). The keyword method consists of the three steps outlined in the table on the following page.

Implementing the Keyword Method		
Step	Action/Explanation	Example
One: Recoding	The teacher selects a <i>keyword</i> , a familiar word that sounds similar to the vocabulary word or term the student must learn. This word needs to be concrete so that the student can easily picture it.	Vocabulary word: coward Definition: Someone who is too afraid to do what is right or expected Keyword: cow
Two: Relating	The teacher must relate the keyword to the new information. This is typically done using an image that shows the keyword interacting with the information to be recalled. This is critical because it is through this interaction that the student establishes a retrieval path or way to recall the needed information.	Image: a frightened cow 

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Time Retrieving	The student must be able to retrieve the information when needed. To do this, the teacher often needs to teach the student a retrieval path and have the student practice it several times.	<p>Retrieval path:</p> <p>a. When presented with “coward,” think of your keyword “cow.”</p> <p>b. Remember the picture of the scared cow.</p> <p>This will help you remember that “coward” means “someone who is too afraid to do what is right or expected.”</p>

It is beneficial for teachers to provide the keyword and the related image to students, especially those with learning disabilities. In addition to being more time efficient, these students tend to have greater recall of information when the relationship is provided instead of when they are asked to create that relationship on their own.

Activity

Review a lesson that you are teaching and identify content that the students are having a difficult time recalling. Using the steps above, create a mnemonic for the students to use. Be sure to list the 1) keyword 2) related sentence, image, or interactive picture, and 3) the retrieval path. After introducing the mnemonic to the student and allowing them time to study the information, formally or informally assess their recall of the content.

Questions

1. Did you find that the students were better able to retain and recall the information once you provided a mnemonic strategy? Please explain.
2. Based on your assessment, which students demonstrated improved recall? Which students showed the most improvement in recall?
3. If you taught this content in the past, compare past students’ recall of the content to the recall of the students who were introduced to the mnemonic strategy.