

# Mnemonic Devices

Mnemonic devices are types of techniques or tricks that help people remember otherwise difficult things that cannot be remembered any other way. Mnemonic devices form an association with material so that it is easier to recall. While these techniques do not ensure that you will actually learn the material, they can aid in retrieval of the information. Below are four applied examples of the most widely used mnemonic devices.

## Acronyms (new words)

These are “words” that are created from the first letters of other words. You probably use acronyms daily and do not even know it! The following are examples of widely recognized acronyms:

SCUBA = Self-contained underwater breathing apparatus

FBI = Federal Bureau of Investigation

HOMES = The five Great Lakes (in the United States)

Acronyms are not only helpful, but they are very easy to create. Below are the five steps to create acronyms:

1. List all the items you will need to remember
2. Underline or circle the first letter of each item in your list
3. Write out the first letter of each keyword you just noted
4. Rearrange these letters to make some memorable word or phrase
5. Memorize and practice this association while translating the meaningful phrase

## Acrostics (creative sentences)

These techniques are very similar to acronyms, but instead of just creating “words” to help form associations an acrostic is a full sentence. A popular example is “Every good boy does fine,” which forms the treble staff lines in music (EGBDF).

The five steps for creating acronyms still apply when creating acrostics. The only difference is that instead of taking the first letter of each item in a list to create a new word (an acronym), you now take the first letters and create new words so that you form an actual sentence that can be silly, bizarre, outrageous, or personal.

## Associations

Associations help to make words and ideas more easily recognizable. Below are four steps to create associations:

1. Understand the information before creating an association, then link it with a new item
2. Visualize the items you want in your association
3. Link items together by meshing the two images into the associations of one picture
4. If possible, create an action “movie” in your head that is more realistic than a still shot

## Rhythms, rhymes, and jingles

Create fun and catchy songs to help you remember information; the sillier, the better! For example, most people will remember that, “in fourteen hundred and ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.”

Adapted from:

Van Blerkom, D. L. (2008). *Taking charge of your learning: A guide to college success* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Thompson Higher Education.

Van Blerkom, D. L. (2009). *College study skills: Becoming a strategic learner* (6th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Wong, L. (2006). *Essential study skills* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Bepko Learning Center  
University College

UC 2006-815 W. Michigan St. Indianapolis, IN 46202-5164 Telephone 317-274-4818 Fax 317-278-0284  
<http://uc.iupui.edu/LearningCenter>