

BBC

The Memory Book

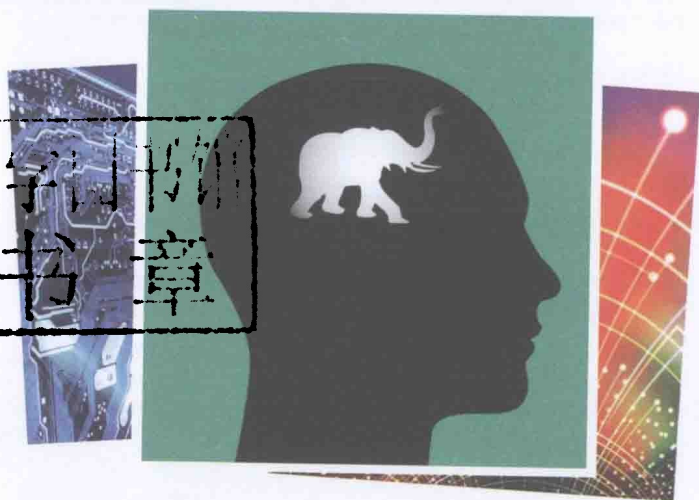
How to remember
anything you want



Tony Buzan™

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藏书章

Tony BuzanTM

with James Harrison, consultant editor

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Dedicated to Zeus and Mnemosyne's ideal muse-child:
my dear, dear friend Lorraine Gill, the Artist

Special Consultants: Dr Sue Whiting GMM and
Grandmaster Raymond Keene, OBE

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Bringing *The Memory Book* into the twenty-first century, 'the Century of the Brain' has been a global team effort, and I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to the entire network of Buzan Centres International now well and truly established – and growing!

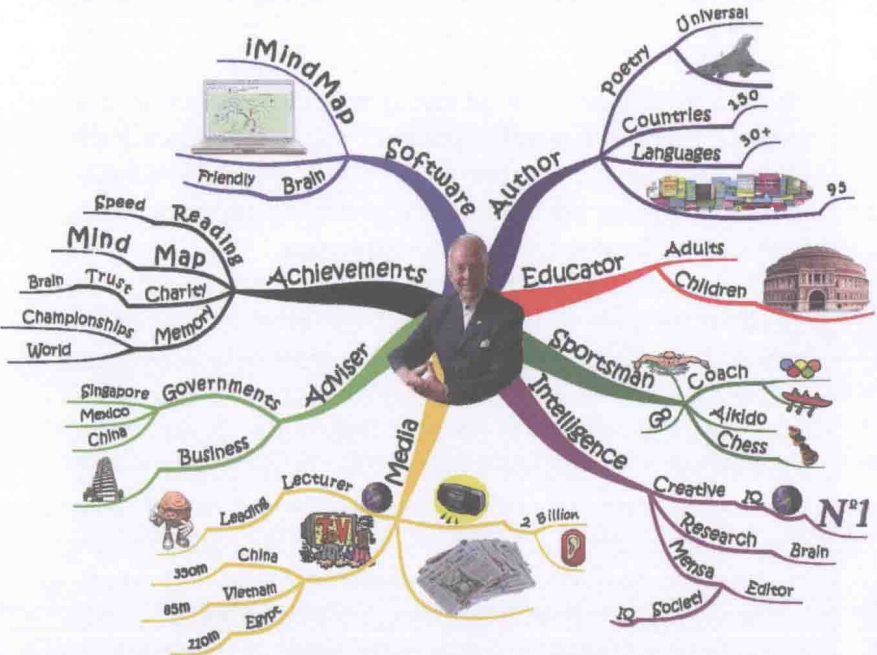
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Here is a full Mind Map employing words and images and hierarchies and categorisation that radiate their own associations and increase the power of memory. It is a Mind Map about the author Tony Buzan.

Foreword

If I told you a story about a schoolboy who failed a number of his 'O' levels, left school aged 16, was told by his teachers that he would never amount to anything, but who eventually became the World Memory Champion, you would probably think I was a writer of fiction and the story could not possibly be true. However, it is true. That 'failure of a lad' was me!

After leaving school, travelling and working at various jobs, I saw a man on television called Creighton Carvello memorise a pack of cards in just under three minutes. To me this was miraculous, although it was obviously not a trick. Creighton really had memorised the cards in that staggeringly short time.

I thought, 'I have a brain the same as he has. If he can do that marvellous feat, there must be a method by which I can also do it.' I set about training myself.

After a few months, I reached the 'Holy Grail' of three minutes. Wondering what to do next with my rapidly growing 'memory muscle', I heard of the first World Memory Championships in 1991, organised by the author of the book you are now reading, Tony Buzan. I entered the competition and, after some mighty mental combat, was declared the first World Memory Champion.

The foundation principles I used to win the World Memory Champion title are those you will find outlined in this book. If you apply these principles to the matrices of knowledge that *The Memory Book* so vividly portrays, you will be able to bestride both the world of memory and the world of knowledge simultaneously, giving yourself the advantages that I found such training and application gave to me: greater self-confidence, a growing mastery of my imagination, improved creativity, vastly improved perceptual skills and, yes, a much higher IQ!

I feel honoured to be able to recommend this enlightening book, whose author has so many credentials. Besides holding the world record for creative IQ, Tony is the author and co-author of over 100 bestsellers about the brain and learning. He is also creator of the now world-famous Mind Maps and, to my mind, is one of the

world's most effective communicators, both verbally and in the written word. He co-founded the Brain Trust, which gave its 2008 Brain of the Century Award to Baroness Susan Greenfield, and is Founder and President of the World Memory Sports Council, which is the governing body of the mind sport of memory and the annual World Memory Championships (held in Bahrain in 2008 and 2009). The Festival of the Mind is now in its eighteenth year and currently includes memory tests on names and faces, plus pack of cards memory – speed, multiple packs of cards – words and shapes (see the Appendix sections for more details about these and other events and organisations).

I feel privileged to have been around in those early years when I and others set modest benchmarks at the birth of a mind sport that now sees ever more countries setting up their own national memory championships and producing the memory stars of the future. As each year passes, new records are established as the standard of competition rises. How inspiring it has been to witness the performances of the greats, including Jonathan Hancock, Andi Bell, Ben Pridmore, Clemens Meyer and Gunther Karsten, as they break new ground and smash previous records.

To the cynic, the memorisation of random decimals, binary numbers and playing cards is little more than a pointless exercise. To me, it has opened up my mind and exposed the truly limitless nature of the human brain. It has given me confidence and the belief that I can learn anything if I put my mind to it, and that is very comforting and reassuring. Practising the art of memory is a beautiful thing and I thoroughly recommend it to everyone.

Congratulations on starting a journey that I know will change your life magnificently.

Dominic O'Brien

Dominic O'Brien, GMM, first and eight times
World Memory Champion

Introduction: A story you will remember for the rest of your life

Let me begin by introducing you to an event that astounded me and that gave me my first realisation that our memories could be perfect.

A student sat, frightened and enthralled. It was the first lesson of his first day at university. He, like the others in his class, had been forewarned that Professor Clark was not only the most brilliant graduate in English the university had ever had; he also looked down on his students from the height of his genius, and used his mental might to embarrass and confuse them. The Professor had deliberately come in late – to add to the tension!

Professor Clark strode nonchalantly into the room, and scanned the class with fiery eyes and a derisive smile.

Rather than going to his desk and ordering his papers in preparation, he stopped in front of his desk, clasped his hands firmly behind his back, and, with that same intent stare accompanied by a sneer, he said, 'First year English? I'll call the roll.' He then began to bark out, machine-gun fashion, the names of the petrified students:

'Abrahamson?'

'Here, sir!'

'Adams?'

'Here, sir!'

'Barlow?'

'Here, sir!'

'Bush?'

'Here, sir!'

'Buzan?'

'Here, sir!' . . .

When he came to the next name he barked out 'Cartland', to which there was a deathly silence. Looking even more intently, the Professor, like some Grand Inquisitor, made soul-burning eye contact with each petrified student, as if expecting them to 'own up' to their already-identified name. Still receiving no response, he sighed deeply, and said, at twice the speed of normal speech: 'Cartland?... Jeremy Cartland, address 2761 West Third Avenue; phone number 794 6231; date of birth September 25th 1941; mother's name Jean, father's name Gordon;... Cartland!?' Still no response! The silence became almost unbearable until, at exactly the right moment, he punctuated it with a shouted and terminal 'Absent!'

And so on and on the Professor continued, calling the roll without hesitation. Whenever a student was absent he would go through the same 'Cartland Routine', presenting the entire database about the absentee even though he could have had no way of knowing, on this first day, who was going to be present and who was going to be absent, even though he had never seen any one of the students before. To everyone in the class it became increasingly apparent that he knew, in the same astounding detail, the same basic biographical information about each of them.

When he had completed the roll call with 'Zygotki?' ... 'Here, Sir!', he looked at the students sardonically and said, with a droll smile, 'That means Cartland, Chapman, Harkstone, Hughes, Luxmore, Mears and Tovey are absent!' He paused again, and then said: 'I'll make a note of that ... some time!'

So saying, he turned and left the room in stunned silence.

To the enthralled student it was one of those moments where a life's 'Impossible Dream' became possible: the dream of training his memory so that it could, in a multitude of special situations, function perfectly.

To be able to remember the names and dates of birth and death and all the important facts about the major artists, composers, writers and other 'greats'!

To be able to remember languages!

To be able to remember the giant catalogues of data from biology and chemistry!

To be able to remember any list he wanted!

To be able to remember like the Professor!

He leapt out of his seat, charged out of the classroom and caught up with Professor Clark in the hallway. He blurted out his question: 'Sir, how did you do that?!' With the same imperious manner, the Professor responded, 'Because, son, I'm a Genius!' And once again turned away, not hearing the student's mumbled response, 'Yes, sir, I know, but still, how did you do that?!'

For two months he pestered 'The Genius', who finally befriended him, and surreptitiously in class translated for him 'the magic formula' for constructing the memory system that had allowed him to so dazzle the students on that memorable first day.

For the next 20 years the student devoured every book he could find on memory, creativity and the nature of the human brain, with the vision constantly in mind of creating new Super Memory Systems that went beyond even what his Professor had been able to accomplish.

The first of these was the Memory Mind Map, a 'Swiss army knife thinking tool for the brain', that allowed the user not only to remember with accuracy and flexibility but also to create, plan, think, learn and communicate on the basis of that memory.

After the Mind Map came the giant, enjoyable and easy-to-use Super Matrix Memory System that would act as a database, allowing people to have immediate access to whatever major information structures were important and necessary to them.

After 25 years, the New System emerged. The enthralled student was me! The one to whom I offer this New System, with delight, is you.

Let's now begin by looking at some further 'mind boggling' evidence about the capacity of our amazing brains.'

Dominic O'Brien, who contributed the Foreword to this book, can memorise 54 packs of cards shuffled together – that's 2808 cards – and make only 8 errors (4 of which he corrected himself after being told that he had made the mistakes) after staring at them once only. Most of us can't remember where we put our car keys.

Memory is both amazing and frustrating: we can see an old school photograph and recognise faces decades back, but forget what we had for breakfast that same morning! Meanwhile, the best brains in the world can crack the genetic code of life and recreate the moment just after the big bang, but the memory landscape remains largely uncharted. It is, to paraphrase Captain James T. Kirk, 'the final real frontier'.

What we do know is that our memory is phenomenal. This statement is made despite the following counter-arguments:

- most people remember fewer than 10 per cent of the names of those whom they meet
- most people forget more than 99 per cent of the phone numbers given to them
- memory is supposed to decline rapidly with age
- many people drink alcohol, and alcohol is reputed to destroy 1000 brain cells per drink
- internationally – across races, cultures, ages and education levels – there is a common experience, and fear of, having an inadequate or bad memory
- our failures in general, and especially in remembering, are attributed to the fact that we are 'only human' – a statement that implies our skills are inherently inadequate
- you will probably fail most of the memory tests in the following chapter or below.

All these, and other memory issues are addressed in this book. You will see that it is possible, with appropriate knowledge, to pass all the tests, and that names and phone numbers are easy to remember – if you know how. You will also discover that, if you use your memory, it will continue to improve throughout your lifetime and that, ultimately, your memory may not only be far better than you ever thought but it may also, in fact, be perfect.

Be positive: your memory really is perfect!

Across cultural and international boundaries, 'negative experiences' with memory can be traced not to our being 'only human' or in any way innately inadequate, but to two simple, easily changeable factors: negative mindset and lack of knowledge.

How often do you hear people in animated and enthusiastic conversation saying things like, 'You know, my memory's not nearly as good as it used to be when I was younger; I'm constantly forgetting things.' To which there is an equally enthusiastic reply, 'Yes, I know exactly what you mean; the same thing's happening to me', and off they go, arms draped around each other's shoulders, down the hill to mental oblivion. I call this the 'I've got an increasingly bad memory club'. This negative, dangerous, incorrect mindset is based on lack of proper training (which using this book will correct).

The only real difference between the middle-aged executive who has forgotten to phone someone he was supposed to and has left his mobile at the office and the seven-year-old child who realises on returning home that he's left at school his watch, his pocket money and his homework, is that the seven-year-old does not collapse into depression, clutching his head and exclaiming, 'Oh my God, I'm seven years old and my memory's going!'

Bear in mind the most often heard memory myth: that memory deteriorates as we get older. This is false. If your brain is used well and stimulated regularly, as it gets older it gets *better*. People in their eighties and nineties can be just as engaging mentally as people half their age. Brain cells don't die off with age. Good memory is not just good for learning, it's good for your quality and enjoyment of life.

Ask yourself, 'What is the number of things I actually remember each day?' Most people estimate somewhere between 100 and 10,000 items. The answer is in fact in the multiple billions. The human memory is so excellent and runs so smoothly that most people don't even realise that all the words they speak and those they listen to are instantaneously produced for consideration, recalled, recognised precisely and placed in their appropriate context. Nor do they appreciate that every moment, every perception, every thought, everything that they do throughout the entire day

and throughout their lives is a function of their memories. In fact, its ongoing accuracy is almost perfect. The few odd things that we do forget are like odd specks on a gigantic ocean. Ironically, the reason we notice so dramatically the errors that we make is that they are so rare.

There are various arguments to support the theory that our memories may be perfect. Here are a few of them.

Dreams

Many of us have vivid dreams of acquaintances, friends, family and lovers we have not perhaps thought about in 20 years or more. In our dreams, however, the images are perfectly clear, all colours and details being exactly as they were in real life.

This confirms that somewhere in the brain there is a vast store of perfect images and associations that does not change with time and, with the right trigger, can be recalled. (In Chapter 18 you will learn about catching your dreams.)

Surprise random recall

Practically everyone has had the experience of turning a corner and suddenly recalling people or events from previous times. This often happens when people revisit their first school. A single smell, touch, sight or sound can bring back a flood of experiences thought to be forgotten.

This ability of any given sense to reproduce perfect memory images, the fact that the smell of bread baking or the sound of a song can bathe your mind in the past, indicates that, if there were more correct 'trigger situations', much more would and could be recollected. We know from such experiences that the brain has retained the information.

The Russian 'S' (Shereshevsky)

In the early part of this century, a young Russian journalist, Shereshevsky (in *The Mind of a Mnemonist*, by A. R. Luria, he is referred to simply as 'S'), attended an editorial meeting and, to the consternation of others there, he didn't take notes. When pressed

to explain why, he became confused. To everyone's amazement, it became apparent that he really did not understand why anyone should ever take notes.

The explanation he gave for not taking notes himself was that he could remember what the editor said, so what was the point? On being challenged, 'S' reproduced the entire speech, word for word, sentence for sentence, and inflection for inflection.

For the next 30 years, 'S' was tested and examined by Alexander Luria, Russia's leading psychologist and expert on memory. When I met him in 1973, Luria confirmed that 'S' was in no way abnormal and his memory was indeed perfect. Luria also stated that, at a very young age, 'S' had 'stumbled upon' the 12 basic mnemonic (memory-enhancing) techniques (see page 33) and they had become part of his natural functioning.

The point is, 'S' was not unique. The history of education, medicine and psychology is dotted with similar cases of perfect memorisers. In every instance, their brains were found to be normal and, in every instance, they had, as young children, 'discovered' the basic principles of their memory's function.

Rosensweig's experiments

A Californian psychologist and neurophysiologist, Professor Mark Rosensweig spent years studying the individual brain cell and its capacity for storage. As early as 1974, he stated that, if we fed ten new items of information into any normal human brain every second for an entire lifetime, that brain would be considerably less than half full. He emphasised that memory problems have nothing to do with the capacity of our brains, but, rather, with the self-management of its apparently limitless capacity.

Penfield's experiments

In Canada, Professor Wilder Penfield discovered the capacity of human memory by mistake.

He was stimulating individual brain cells with tiny electrodes for the purpose of locating areas of the brain that were the cause of patients' epilepsy. To his amazement, he found that, when he stimu-

lated certain individual brain cells, his patients were suddenly recalling experiences from their past. The patients emphasised that it was not simple memory, but they actually were reliving the entire experience, including smells, noises, colours, movement, tastes. These experiences ranged from a few hours before the experimental session to as much as 40 years earlier.

Penfield suggested that, hidden within each brain cell or cluster of brain cells, is a perfect store of every event of our past and, if we could find the right stimulus, we could replay the entire film.

The potential pattern-making ability of your brain

Professor Pyotr Anokhin of Moscow University, famous as Pavlov's brightest student, spent his last years investigating the potential pattern-making capabilities of the human brain. His findings were important for memory researchers.

It seems that memory is recorded in separate little patterns, or electromagnetic circuits, that are formed by our brain's interconnecting cells. Anokhin already knew that each brain contains one million million (1,000,000,000,000) brain cells, but even this gigantic number was going to be small in comparison to the number of patterns those brain cells could make among themselves.

Working with advanced electron microscopes and computers, Anokhin came up with a staggering number. He calculated that the number of patterns, or 'degrees of freedom', throughout each brain is, to use his own words:

'So great that writing it would take a line of figures, in normal manuscript characters, more than ten and a half million kilometres in length. With such a number of possibilities, the brain is a keyboard on which hundreds of millions of different melodies can be played.'

Your memory is the music.

Photographic memory

Also known as eidetic memory, this is a specific phenomenon of people remembering, usually for a very short time, perfectly and exactly, anything they have seen. This memory usually fades, but it

can be so accurate that it enables somebody, after seeing a picture of 1000 randomly sprayed dots on a white sheet, to reproduce them perfectly.

This suggests that, in addition to the deep, long-term storage capacity, we also have a shorter-term and immediate photographic ability. It is argued that children often have this ability as a natural part of their mental functioning and we train it away by forcing them to concentrate too much on logic and language and too little on imagination and their other mental skills.

The 1000 photographs test

In one set of memory experiments, people were shown 1000 photographs, one after the other, at a pace of about a photograph per second. The psychologists then mixed another 100 photographs in with the original 1000 and asked the people to select those that they had not seen the first time through. Everyone, regardless of how they described their normal memory, was able to identify almost every photograph that they had seen previously – as well as each one they had not.

They were not necessarily able to remember the order in which the photographs had been presented, but they could definitely remember the images – an example that confirms the common human experience of being better able to remember a face than the name attached to it. This particular problem is easily dealt with by applying 'mnemonics' (see overleaf).

Mnemonics

'Mnemonics' (pronounced 'nem-on-ics') is the name given to memory aids that help you to remember something. These may be a word, a picture, a system or other device that will help you to recall a phrase, a name or a sequence of facts. The 'm' in mnemonic is silent and the word comes from the Greek word *mnemon*, which means 'mindful'.

Most of us will have used mnemonic techniques to learn things during our schooldays, even if we didn't realise it at the time. How about "i" before "e" except after "c" for grammar and spelling or the phrase 'Every Good Boy Deserves Favour' to help remember the notes on the treble clef (from the lowest), EGBDF.