

SOAS LANGUAGE CENTRE

LEARNER SUPPORT

Remembering words

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Here are just some of the techniques for learning words that often come up at our workshops.

- **Label** everyday objects at home, at work, in your car, etc. Say the word out loud every time you see the object.
- Arrange words in **groups**, e.g. by topic, grammar category, sound, initial letter or character, etc. Prepare lists in notebooks, mind maps, webs, hooks, pictures. We all store words in our head in a very complex structure called the Mental Lexicon, but research cannot give definite answers yet to the equally complex issue of *how* we store them. Grouping words the way *you* think is most helpful is the best way to go about it. With mind maps or hooks you can create little stories linking all the new words. You can also draw an image next to each word to help you remember it.
- Link words to **images**. File photos, e.g. taken from magazines, or your very own photos, name every item in the photo, and revise frequently. Some research suggests that there is more space in your long term memory for visual information than for verbal. Linking words to images can help you to put words into your long-term memory.
- **Record** yourself saying the new words. Listen to the recordings frequently (e.g. on your MP3 player while commuting). Some of us may not have a 'good ear', but it is good to involve all senses while learning. There are learners who rely a lot on hearing things. For some, visual information may even get in the way of processing information.
- Put the new words in **context** by writing example sentences or mini-stories. If you are a complete beginner, it can help if you write a sentence in your first language, entering the word you want to learn, especially if there is some strong association.
e.g. In Japanese, the word for 'dictionary', *jisho* - 辞書, sounds a bit like *Jesus*. So, to help me remember the word I say '*Jesus! I need to buy an electronic jisho, or I'm lost!*'.
- If you make up a short story, the more absurd it is the better. Choose a memorable, striking image and make a story using the new words.
- Make your own **flash cards**.
- Make **associations** with words that may sound similar to words in your first language. For example, *kaban* - 鞆 = 'bag', sounds similar to *καμπάνα* (*kabana*), which means 'bell' in my first language, Greek. So, I say there is a *καμπάνα* (*kabana*) in my *kaban*, and I draw a picture of a bell in a bag.
- Try to use the new words every time you have a chance to practise speaking. Make up dialogues and little stories in your head, or even describe what you see around you, using the new words. By voicing the words you involve not only your brain but also your vocal cords, tongue, mouth, and lips. This helps the processing of the language to become more complete, and gradually more automatic.
- Try to learn words that interest you most. You will learn them more quickly, and you'll get a confidence boost.
- Talk about how *you* learn new words. Share your tips and techniques with other language learners.