**PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

*About the Training Program*

In an era that stresses continuous improvement and rapid adaptation to change, being able to learn new material and skills quickly is critical. Employees are expected to master higher-order skills using constantly changing technology and to take on new tasks in the wake of downsizing. In this environment, they are being challenged as never before.

In such an environment, the ability to learn quickly and well is not only a competitive advantage but a requirement for economic survival. This program explores the benefits of seeking out and meeting today’s learning opportunities. It is designed to help participants learn faster, more easily, and better, serving as a springboard to success for the training they will receive in the future.

This program focuses on specific thinking tools and provides practical ways to identify, learn about, and use these tools. Participants will learn to capitalize on their unique learning styles, using the latest findings and techniques. The goal is to break through personal learning blocks and to increase participants’ confidence in their ability to learn and solve problems.

*Training Objectives*

Participants will have the following opportunities:

- To become increasingly aware of their intellectual strengths;
- To understand and maximize their preferred learning style and approach;
- To learn to read actively for understanding and recall;
- To learn and apply techniques to learn and remember more effectively; and
- To learn to lock in learning using practice, memory mapping, and rest.

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Designed by Jeanne Baer.
# PROGRAM OUTLINE

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I. Opening Activities

A. Overview of the Program (Presentation)

1. Describe today’s rapidly changing work environment as one characterized by reengineering, continuous improvement, cross-training, and so on.

2. Add that, because of this, it is more important than ever before to be able to learn new material and skills quickly.

3. State that this program is designed to help participants do just that. Share the following program objectives:

   • To become more aware of intellectual strengths,
   • To understand and maximize preferred learning styles and approaches,
   • To learn to read actively for understanding and recall,
   • To learn and apply techniques to learn and remember more effectively, and
   • To learn to lock in learning using practice, memory mapping, and rest.

4. Using a memory map, demonstrate what the program will cover to give participants a feeling of what they will experience. State that memory mapping is a technique that will be discussed later.

5. Encourage participants to keep an open mind about learning during the program. Remind them how much they learned by the time they were five years old. Explain that this early learning was accomplished because at the time learning was either fun or important to survival.

B. What’s in It for Me? (Response Cards; Materials: Index Cards)

1. Pass out index cards to the participants and explain that you want each participant to write down an example of how learning to learn faster and more effectively would help with his or her job.

2. Ask three participants to volunteer to share what they wrote on their cards. Utilize these three contributions as examples of the pressures we all face “to get up to speed” in a workplace that is constantly changing and where new knowledge and new demands emerge all the time.

3. Conclude by saying that there are many ways that learning how to learn faster and remember more can help people become more effective and able to meet today’s challenges.
II. Intellectual Strengths and Preferences

A. How Are You Smart? (Game; Materials: Prepared “Bingo” Cards)

1. In advance, prepare “bingo” cards with sixteen to twenty-five squares. Fill each square with a strength or skill that corresponds to the following kinds of intelligences:

   - Linguistic
   - Logical/mathematical
   - Spatial/artistic
   - Bodily/kinesthetic
   - Musical
   - Interpersonal
   - Intrapersonal

   Example items follow:

   - Excels in Scrabble (linguistic)
   - Computes numbers in head (logical/mathematical)
   - Great at jigsaw puzzles (spatial/artistic)
   - Well-coordinated (bodily/kinesthetic)
   - Quickly learns a song (musical)
   - Counsels others well (interpersonal)
   - Meditative, reflective (intrapersonal)

2. Distribute a bingo card to each participant and invite the participants to mill around, seeking out others who possess the skills and strengths on their cards and asking them to sign those squares that match their skills or strengths. Participants may not use another person’s signature more than once.

3. Encourage participants to find out more about the person by asking him or her to provide one example of how he or she uses this skill or strength.

4. Instruct the participants to say “Bingo” when they have filled the card with signatures.

5. Debrief this exercise by discussing the wide range of skills and strengths represented by the participants.
B. Seven Types of Intelligence (Writing Task; Materials: Large Adhesive Labels, Colored Pens)

1. State that Howard Gardner (1983) has identified at least seven different ways in which people exhibit intelligence and that each person is a natural-born genius in at least one way. Add that these intelligences, which are not necessarily the ones needed to get A’s in school, often correlate better with what is needed for lifelong success.

2. Write the seven categories on a flip-chart page:

   • Linguistic
   • Logical/mathematical
   • Spatial/artistic
   • Bodily/kinesthetic
   • Musical
   • Interpersonal
   • Intrapersonal

3. Distribute a label to each participant. Ask each person to fill in the statement “I’m a natural-born __________________ genius!” by writing his or her strongest type of intelligence on the label and putting it on to wear.

4. Conclude by stating that, regardless of which is their strongest intelligence, the participants have the ability to learn successfully by utilizing all of their intelligences.

C. Your Learning Approach (Dyadic Discussion; Materials: Form A)

1. State that in order to learn how to learn better, it is important to know how one learns.

2. Explain that research shows that people learn in either a sequential or a random manner, although some people use a combination. Random learners prefer to jump around, making connections as they go. Sequential learners prefer to progress from one fact to the next. Add that knowing how one processes information can be a big help in learning more easily and effectively.

3. Distribute copies of Form A and ask the participants to study the information for a few minutes and to consider which approach is most like the one they use.

4. Form dyads, pairing learners with the same styles as much as possible, and ask them to discuss the following:
• A brief description of an upcoming learning opportunity
• Difficulties they perceive in this learning
• Strategies that may be helpful

5. Instruct the dyad members to offer suggestions and feedback to one another using the information provided on Form A and their own experiences.

6. Close the activity by stating that effective learning comes from finding comfortable and natural ways to learn.

D. Your Learning Style (Subgroup Discussion)

1. State that, just as one’s approach is important to effective learning, so is one’s style (auditory, visual, kinesthetic).

2. Poll the group by asking, “When you attend a class, how many of you take lots of notes? How many of you prefer just to listen? How many prefer a hands-on activity?”

3. State that research shows that most people use all three styles, but some people have such a strong preference that they have difficulty learning if the presenter uses a different modality.

4. Form three subgroups and assign each subgroup one of the following situations:
   • Listening to a lecture
   • Reading textbooks and manuals
   • Learning a new job or task

5. Ask the subgroups to brainstorm as many ways as they can think of for people to use all three modalities to become more actively involved in the assigned learning.

6. Ask the subgroups to choose a recorder and a presenter and to record their ideas on newsprint.

7. Ask the presenter from each subgroup to post and present the group’s ideas, asking others for additional ideas or suggestions that have worked for them.

8. Compare the suggestions to the ideas below:

   While listening to a lecture, you can ...
   • Examine any visual aids.
   • Take notes, perhaps in various colors, and draw pictures or maps of what you hear.
   • Watch the instructor’s body language for extra cues.
• Ask questions and join in discussions.
• Become involved in demonstrations or hands-on activities.
• Recite key points in your head, “hearing” them once again, as they are made.

While reading textbooks and manuals, you can ...

• Highlight important information.
• “Hear” the material in your head as you read.
• Add your own notes in the margins.
• Read especially difficult material out loud.
• Discuss the meaning of the material with a fellow student.
• Move around as you read.
• Draw pictures or maps of the new information.
• Think over and write out what you believe to be the key points on a separate sheet of paper.
• Try applying “how-to” material as soon as possible.
• Explain your version of what you have read to someone unfamiliar with it or to an imaginary audience.

While learning a new job or task, you can ...

• Ask questions as it is being explained.
• Ask to try the task yourself.
• Picture yourself performing the new task perfectly.
• Ask an expert to watch you and give some feedback.
• Try to do the task in a simulated way if making a mistake would be too costly.

III. Active Reading

A. SQ3R (Lecturette)

1. Introduce this section by stating that much of what people have to learn is acquired through reading. Ask, “But how often do you read something and get to the end and have no idea what you read?”

2. Add that often people read without being engaged in what they are reading.
3. Explain that learning how to scan material before actually reading it can help the learner become more engaged in the material. One form of this scanning is called the SQ3R Method.

4. State the elements of this method while writing them on a flip chart:
   - Survey
   - Question
   - Read
   - Recite
   - Review

B. Perfect Practice Makes Perfect (Study Group; Materials: Form B, Post-it® Notes)

1. Form subgroups of three to five members each and distribute Form B. Give three to four Post-it® Notes to each subgroup.

2. Ask the participants to scan Form B quickly (allow two to three minutes) and to write down questions they hope the text will answer based on the headings and subheadings.

3. Call on members of each subgroup for a sample of their questions.

4. Ask participants to now read Form B thoroughly, searching for the answers to their questions.

5. Ask the subgroup members to discuss the answers they have found. Instruct them to underline the parts of the text that contain the answers and to place a Post-it® Note with each question by that appropriate section of text.

6. Reconvene the entire group and ask for volunteers to discuss their questions and answers.

7. Point out that the next step in active reading is to recite the material or say it back.

8. Re-form the subgroups and ask the members to recite to one another what they have learned.

9. Briefly go over the “Review” section on Form B.

10. Obtain participants’ reactions to this method of active reading. Point out that the steps of SQ3R can also be used when reading an entire book. If you have time, demonstrate book scanning with a book you have brought with you. Start by scanning the front and back covers, then the table of contents, then the index.
IV. Memorization Techniques

A. Who Can Remember? (Game; Materials: Two Small Prizes)

1. Transition to the importance of memorizing material. State that after you have learned something, either by reading or another modality, some things must be memorized. Add that although many things can be looked up, sometimes there isn’t time or the opportunity.

2. Ask the group for examples of material that must be memorized. Mention the following if no one else does:

   • Giving CPR
   • Taking tests
   • Names
   • Numbers

3. Ask participants to stand. Pose the question, “How many middle names of participants can you remember?”

4. Instruct the participants to circulate, learning as many middle names as they can. (If a person does not have a middle name, ask him or her to give a last name.)

5. Create as much of a sense of urgency as possible, telling the participants that prizes will be awarded to the people who remember the most names.

6. After two or three minutes, stop the participants and ask them to write down the names. Award token prizes to the two people who correctly remember the most middle names. Ask the winners to share any tricks they used to be successful.

7. Admit you did everything you could to make memorizing difficult in the previous exercise and congratulate everyone for doing so well. State that now you will help them learn some unusual techniques for memorizing.

B. Making Associations (Subgroup Exchange)

1. Begin the discussion by explaining that one helpful way to memorize is by creating associations. Associations are bridges from what we know to what we do not know.

2. Present the following points about making associations:

   • They take time but save more time in the long run.
   • They must be vivid and outstanding (for example, associating the names of people you meet with well-known personalities).
• They should involve as many senses as possible (for example, FE is the symbol for iron, which comes alive when it is associated with a vision of “Iron Feet”—feet clad in heavy iron boots, clomping loudly into a room).

• They should not be too sensible or they will be forgotten.

3. Form trios and instruct participants to work together to think of an association for their middle names. Once each trio has practiced this technique, instruct the trios to form groups of six and to form associations for one another.

■ C. Remembering in Sequence (Dyadic Discussion)

1. Indicate that people often need to remember concepts or facts in a certain order. Add that this presents a new challenge but that the participants can draw from what they have learned about forming associations to help themselves.

2. Ask the group for examples of things they need to remember in order and mention the following as examples, if needed:

   • First-aid procedures
   • Points in a speech
   • Logging into a computer system

3. State that there are several ways to learn a sequence. Write the following on a flip chart:

   • “In the first place. . . .”
   • Vivid stories
   • Acronyms and creative sentences

4. Describe “In the first place” as a method in which you picture places along a habitual route or steps in a personal routine and associate facts with those places or steps. This method uses a story-telling approach that starts with the phrase, “in the first place . . .” and continues with, “then, in the second place . . .” and so forth.

Supply an example from your own life, such as “I walk up to the door of my house and where I put the KEY in the lock is item #1. I open the door and am greeted by my DOG and there, in his mouth, is item #2. I put my things down on the COUNTER and there is item #3. I go to the MAILBOX and there is item #4, and so on.”

Give participants a minute to envision the places along their own routes or the items involved in a personal routine (for example, taking a shower) that can be used in a story to remember new facts.
5. Explain that vivid stories are wild, memorable stories that link items in a certain order. To illustrate this technique, make up a story that connects the names of our first eight presidents (Washington, J. Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, J.Q. Adams, Jackson, and Van Buren). Do not tell the participants the names of the presidents. For instance, the story might be set in a hotel and involve (1) a washing machine, (2) an atom bomb, (3) a chef, (4) medicine, (5) money and roe, (6) another atom bomb, (7) a jack, and (8) a van. Dramatically act out your story, helping participants to “see” the scenes you describe. Go through the story quickly again and let the group call out the words. As you act out the story, write each word and draw a quick cartoon to illustrate it on a flip chart. Encourage participants to join you in doing so on their own paper. Then remove the words and sketches and ask participants to write the words down in order from memory.

Provide a few moments of relaxation or give participants a break. When you reconvene the group, ask the participants to take a piece of paper and write down the names of the first eight presidents in order. Ask them to use the words linked in the previous story as a guide. They should find it easy to get them all right. Congratulate the participants and point out that, while it takes some time to construct a story linking the items they want to remember, they will remember sequential information far longer than if they used rote memorization.

6. Explain that acronyms and creative sentences use letters or words that one can relate to or recall (for example, MADD: Mothers Against Drunk Drivers or My Very Educated Mother Just Served Us Nine Pizzas: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto).

7. Ask participants to think of a sequence of events or actions that they need to learn. Instruct them to work independently and to choose one of the three methods (“in the first place,” vivid stories, acronyms and creative sentences) and try it out. When they are through, ask them to form pairs and to discuss with their partners the method they chose and how well they think it will work.

■ V. Locking in Learning

■ A. Distributive Practice (Dyadic Discussion)

1. Introduce this section by stating that learning retention requires periodic review.

2. Poll the group by asking, “How many of you have crammed for an exam and then were unable to recall the facts during the exam?” “How many of you were able to regurgitate the facts during a test but forgot them only a few hours later?”

3. State that cramming is an ineffective way of learning. Instead, point out that greater retention can be achieved using distributed practice. In this approach, the optimal plan is to test yourself on new material five minutes after learning it, one hour later, the next day after a night’s sleep, a week later, and a month later.
4. Ask participants to select something they are currently learning that they want to retain for a long period of time. Invite them to develop a plan of periodic review that they would be willing to follow. Ask each participant to share this plan with another participant.

■ **B. The Role of Rest (Lecturette)**

1. Ask, “Who knows what parts of a lecture people remember best?” If no one guesses correctly, tell the participants that the answer is the first and last parts.

2. Explain that frequent breaks during a lecture are helpful since people cannot concentrate well for longer than fifty minutes. Add that even ten minutes can be a long time for strenuous concentration.

3. Instruct participants to get up, stretch, and walk around for a few minutes and even to think about something entirely different. Then ask them how they feel after having done that.

4. Explain that our brains sort and file information while we rest; thus sleep can help people to process information better. Add that sleep deprivation interferes with this process and can be detrimental to learning.

5. Conclude by saying that people often complain that they become forgetful as they grow older. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that not getting enough rest in the fast-paced lives we lead today accounts for these annoying memory lapses.

■ **C. Learning About Memory Mapping (Writing Task; Materials: Form C)**

1. State that another way for participants to lock in learning is to “memory map” what they have read or heard. Add that in this section they will have another opportunity to practice SQ3R while learning about and practicing memory mapping.

2. Reinforce the importance of using as many senses as possible when trying to learn. Add that memory mapping involves the learner visually and kinesthetically and that it is fun.

3. Distribute Form C to each person. Ask the participants to scan the information quickly, writing down three questions they each have about the material.

4. Instruct the participants to now read Form C carefully to look for the answers to the questions they have, underlining them as they find them.

5. Conduct a discussion with the group members about their questions and answers.
D. Creating a Memory Map (Creative Activity; Materials: Colored Pens, Blank Paper)

1. State that it is now time to conduct a review. Reiterate the stages of the SQ3R method and explain to the participants that they will now have the opportunity to construct a memory map together.

2. Hand out colored pens and blank sheets of paper.

3. Write the words “Memory Mapping” in the middle of a flip-chart page and draw a circle around them.

4. Ask the following questions:
   - “What are the main subtopics in the piece you have just read? What does this article cover?” (As the participants identify the topics, write each on a line extending from the article title.)
   - “What are key concepts within each subtopic?” (Write each concept down on a line extending from the subtopic.)
   - “What pictures or icons can we draw to illustrate the concepts we want most to remember?” (Tell the participants not to worry about their artistic ability but just to have fun with the process.)

5. After you have completed a few subtopics, ask the participants to flesh out their own memory maps.

6. Conduct a discussion on what this process has been like for the participants.

VI. Closing Activities

A. From Today to Tomorrow (Creative Activity; Materials: Blank Paper, Colored Pens)

1. Ask participants to draw their own mind maps illustrating what they have learned today and how they plan to use that information in the future.

2. Suggest that, to start the mind map, each person should choose a word that describes how he or she feels about what has been learned and write that word in the center of the paper.

3. Suggest that the participants use symbols and pictures as much as possible, rather than words, to develop their mind maps.

4. Tell the participants that their mind maps are for their use only and need not be shared with anyone unless they want to share them.
B. Gallery of Learning (Subgroup Discussion)

1. Form subgroups of four members each.

2. Ask subgroup members to discuss what they are taking away from the training experience, focusing on personal and professional outcomes.

3. Ask the subgroups to list these outcomes on newsprint, writing the heading “What We Are Taking Away” at the top.

4. Post the lists on the walls and ask each person to walk by and read the other subgroups’ lists, adding check marks to any additional ideas or learnings that the person can take away.

5. Reconvene the entire group and survey the most important learnings.

6. Thank everyone for their hard work and tell them that you hope that their opportunities for personal and professional growth will be significantly enhanced by their having learned how to learn better.

7. Encourage the participants to use their new skills and to enjoy the success that comes from being a natural-born genius learner.
Sequential or Random? Your Learning Approach

How does your brain approach learning? Understanding your own approach may explain your past learning experiences and guarantee success with future learning. Most people approach learning in either a *sequential* or a *random* way. But even if you use both approaches, these tips will help you learn faster and more easily.

**Sequential learners . . .**

- Like to know a lot about one subject.
- Like to read and learn step-by-step, in a logical sequence, mastering one topic or chapter before tackling the next and building up knowledge progressively.
- Tend to remember specific names, dates, and places.
- Concentrate on relevant information when doing research or solving a problem.
- Prepare a detailed plan of action to learn a body of information.

This approach is beneficial because . . .

- Many educators (and trainers) and textbooks use this step-by-step approach.
- Exams often call for a knowledge of specifics.

**Random learners . . .**

- Prefer to be generalists who know a little about a lot of subjects.
- Tend to skip around in their reading, “grazing” on topics of special interest.
- Like to start by understanding (and are more likely to remember) general principles and the big picture before getting down to finer details.
- Like having background (versus strictly relevant) information when doing research or solving a problem.
- Prefer an unstructured learning environment, following only general guidelines when learning a body of information.

This approach is beneficial because . . .

- Learners can find relationships and draw parallels among different areas.
- Learners can synthesize diverse bits of information when an all-around treatment of a subject is needed.
Do you think you are a sequential or a random learner? Why do you think so?

**Sequential Learner Difficulties**

- Sequential learners become anxious about how best to proceed and end up procrastinating.
- Sequential learners’ good grasp of details sometimes causes them to overlook equally essential broad concepts (the “can’t-see-the-forest-for-the-trees” effect).
- When sequential learners make mistakes, they are likely to lose motivation, become more anxious and/or lose confidence in their abilities.

**Sequential Learner Success Strategies**

1. Start by taking a look at the major topics within the subject so you can get an idea of the scope and priorities in that field. You will also get an idea of the order in which your topics must be researched or mastered.

2. Construct a very careful plan of action before you start studying. Don’t worry about taking some time for this; you will more than make up for it once you start because you will have the confidence of a solid structure for (and control over) your study. Making a plan is natural for you! Consider how much time you have to learn the material and give yourself a deadline by which to master each topic. Modify your plan as time passes, if you need to.

3. To see the “forest” as well as the “trees,” jot down notes on your study schedule to remind you of general principles and overall concepts. Study these toward the end of your studies, once you have already accumulated a large body of basic information.

4. Use your natural ability to build up knowledge progressively; do not move on to a new topic until you have mastered the previous one. Learn specific facts first and only then should you move on to more general concepts. You will build not only your knowledge but also your confidence in this way.

5. To increase learning efficiency, try the following research-based method when you have many topics to master:
   - First, study your first two topics or chapters separately before going over them together.
   - Next learn topic three and then review all three topics mentally.
   - Finally, study topic four and go over it, together with the three earlier topics, in your mind. If there are more than four items to be learned, simply treat the fifth topic on the list as if it were topic one and repeat the same study sequence.
Random Learner Difficulties

- Random learners feel frustrated by traditional, methodical methods and texts that are too rigid for them.
- Random learners have difficulty remembering specific details.

Random Learner Success Strategies

1. Random learners sometimes underestimate how much time it will take to conduct research, write a paper, and complete projects. Start your learning project early and establish a few “checkpoint” deadlines so that you will do your best work and avoid making rushed mistakes.

2. If you are researching a topic, jump right in; go to the library and “read around” in several books and magazines that look interesting. Feel free to explore several aspects or topics simultaneously. Don’t feel that there is anything wrong because you are not being systematic or following the logical sequence of the textbooks.

3. Always begin your learning by considering the general principles involved; get a grasp of the overall picture before starting to master specific aspects of the subject. Doing so is natural to you and will help you to grasp the context for the details. (It is comparable to looking at that essential photograph on the cover of the jigsaw box before beginning to put the pieces together.) However, as you do this, keep a separate list of the detailed, factual parts of the subject that you will want to master later. This way, you will not be nervous about that necessary aspect of learning, but will keep it on the back burner.

4. When presented with lectures or texts that stress detail, find general concepts to tie these into. Remember, you have a natural ability to form mental connections among items of information; you must make the time to do so. Consider how each item relates to the next so that you can build up associations between and among them. In this way, you will be able to recall the specifics.

5. When trying to organize and master several topics, do not learn topic one, then topic two, and so on. Instead, try this “grouping” method: Learn the first two topics separately and then review them together. Now do the same with the third and fourth topics, reviewing them together. Return to the first two topics and go through them in your mind; then carry out the same recall technique on topics three and four. Finally, rehearse all four items together. If you have additional topics to learn, take the next four and begin this procedure again.

Reading Actively to Understand and Remember

In today’s Information Age, we don’t lack for something to read. On the contrary, we lack the time to read everything we want and need to read to keep up. And unless our reading is for sheer pleasure, we also need to comprehend and recall what we read. This is difficult to accomplish when books, manuals, newspapers, and magazines are all demanding our attention.

Inactive reading is expensive.

Many people have had the experience of plowing through an assigned reading, only to realize after a few paragraphs that they are “lost in space” and have no memory of what they have just read. Such readers pay a heavy price for their unfocused, inactive reading habits, either in terms of failing to master critical knowledge or in terms of spending extra time re-reading the “mystery” paragraphs (or worse, pages).

You may already be a “power reader.”

Do you read every word of the newspaper every day? Probably not. You probably begin by scanning the headlines for stories that interest you and reading those. Then you may scan the rest of the paper for headlines, subheads, photos, photo captions, ads, and anything else that interests you. And while you do so, various questions pop into your head—issues you are curious about, which you think will be answered by the articles or ads themselves.

You can learn any material in this same way by making active, “power reading” a habit—a healthy habit that will serve you for the rest of your life.

SQ3R your way to better learning.

One of the earliest, most widely used, and best researched methods to read and understand was developed by Professor Francis Robins and tested at Ohio State University. This method is now widely taught in schools. The method consists of five steps: survey, question, read, recite, and review—SQ3R. Although SQ3R was designed to help individual readers, it can also be used by group members who are reading or solving a problem together.

1. Survey—Get Oriented

Begin by getting into an optimal learning state. Once you feel you are in a state of relaxed alertness, you are ready for the survey step. Take just a few minutes to scan the article, essay, or book. If you are tackling a book, read the inside flap: What will be covered? Survey the table of contents and index: What stands out?

If you are reading an article, an essay, or one chapter of a book, scan the headings
and subheadings. Read the summary or conclusion if one exists. What is it all about? Glance at any other “signposts” (such as photos, charts, and their captions) to get a feel for what you will be reading.

If none of these clues exist, skim the first sentence of each paragraph.

2. **Question—Stay Engaged**

Just as your car does not move forward until a gear is engaged, your reading comprehension will not move forward until your brain is engaged. As you surveyed the material, if you actively focused on it, some questions may have popped into your mind.

Stay engaged now and glance back at the headings. Ask yourself what interesting questions this material might answer. For instance, if a chapter heading or an article subheading says, “Essential Listening Skills,” convert that into a question such as, “What listening skills are really essential today?” (These questions, you will find, often begin with “what” or “how.”) Convert each heading into a question in this way, building your own interest in the material as you go along.

3. **Read—Be a Detective**

Now it is time to read the material. You will find that your reading is directed by the questions you thought of. Your questions also help organize both the information in the section you are studying and your thoughts about the information.

As you read, be a detective, looking for the answers to your questions. You may find the reading does not answer your question; that’s okay, just ask another question that it does answer. Or you may find that as you answer your initial questions, others will pop up—that’s good! It means you are staying actively involved. This “detective reading” will also make your studying more interesting, relevant, and memorable.

Do not slow your reading by lingering and examining turns of phrase. Remember, if you are really concentrating, you will not be distracted or need to reread passages. If you find you are drifting off, take a short break and return when you can be focused and alert.

4. **Recite—Say It Back**

After you have finished reading the article or a section of the book, briefly state in your own words the answers to your questions. Then jot down briefly, in your own words, what you believe are the most important facts, definitions, and events from what you have just read. If you are unable to do so (be honest!), reread until you can.

Then go back and find your answers in the text. Underline or highlight these key phrases. By waiting until this stage to highlight material, you are sure to pick out only the most important facts. If you add a few working notes in the margins, the reading will be even more meaningful to you.
Another excellent way to recite is to convert your opinions about the reading’s key points into a memory map. In other words, you diagram these points and, where possible, add simple pictures to lock these images and key points in your memory.

5. **Review—Check Back and Forth**

Reviewing is another way of reciting. If you have made conscientious working notes, they will serve as both an outline of the main points and also as answers to the questions you asked earlier. This step is actually just an extension of the previous one. Review your notes and your memory map and then glance at the text to see whether you have missed anything. If you have, then simply add to your notes and your map.

**Practice makes perfect.**

If focused, active reading is new to you, make the commitment to develop this skill. If it seems time-consuming and awkward at first, keep practicing and be patient with yourself. In time, it will become a healthy habit, and you will be learning at peak efficiency.
Memory Mapping

Imagine someone describing a map of the United States to you. While the person details the arrangement of fifty states stretched over the land mass, the mountains that punctuate the landscape, and the rivers that flow through the country, you begin to feel a little panic-stricken trying to grasp and remember it all.

Now, imagine instead someone showing you a map of the United States in a giant atlas. Ah, now you can see it all, from sea to shining sea, at a glance. After looking closely at the map, you know you understand and can recall what you have seen.

Memory Mapping Defined

A memory map is similar to this map of the United States in that it helps you to grasp and recall material more clearly. It is a diagram that features key words and simple pictures to remind you of the concepts you want to learn or remember.

An alternate method of taking notes, a memory map is also a helpful way to review your learning. What makes it even more memorable is that you create it yourself; you do not have to study and try to make sense of someone else’s interpretation of important concepts.

How Memory Mapping Aids Retention

Although people usually take notes in a linear or outline form, the brain does not work that way. As we are learning and recalling, our brains create connections between bits of information organized around a central theme. Memory mapping is a way of taking notes in this same natural, interconnected way.

We know that we are far more likely to grasp and remember pictures than actual words. (How many times have we heard that pictures are worth a thousand of them?!) Memory mapping also aids retention by using pictures, symbols, and colors instead of or in addition to the key words we want to recall.

In a nutshell, memory maps engage the whole brain and make concepts memorable. Once you learn how to map your learning, you will find that it is fun, creative, and even relaxing. You won’t dread reviewing your notes when they are in the form of imaginative memory maps.

How to Make a Memory Map

1. Begin by writing the subject of your note-taking in the middle of a sheet of paper. Enclose the subject in a circle, square, or other shape.
2. Add a branch extending out from the center for each key point or main idea you want to remember. The number of branches will vary with the number of ideas or segments presented.

3. Write a key word or phrase on each branch, adding other branches for additional details. Do not write whole sentences on your branches; you will have difficulty memorizing and later “seeing” long strings of words.

4. Add symbols, cartoons, or illustrations for better recall. Do not be afraid to be creative and outrageous. Remember, the brain is more likely to remember ludicrous images than sensible ones.

**Additional Memory-Mapping Tips**

1. Turn your paper horizontally; you will have more usable space.

2. If you are mapping a chapter of a book or manual, consider giving branches the same titles as the headings or subheadings.

3. In addition to key words, jot down abbreviations on your memory map. But use only those you are really familiar with so that you will recognize them days or weeks later. As you become more skilled at mapping, you will develop your own shorthand of commonly used abbreviations and symbols.

4. Make important ideas stand out by underlining them, making them larger, or making them especially bold.

5. If you have several colors available, use a different color for each branch. This color-coding will help your brain to lock in learning.

6. If possible, play pleasant, refreshing music while you memory map. Experiment to find the music that works for you.

**Other Applications**

Memory mapping is not only a good method to recite or review what you have read, it is also an interesting way to scan your material before you actually read it. When you are surveying the text, make a map of the questions you hope to learn the answers to.

Some skilled memory mappers make maps instead of taking notes as they listen to a lecture. That way, if a speaker suddenly remembers to make a point about a previous thought, the mapper can easily add it to the appropriate place on the map. Other people prefer to take more traditional notes and then translate them into a memory map afterward.

As you can imagine, memory mapping a speech you plan to deliver is an excellent practice. You “recite” the speech as you construct the map. When you practice delivering the speech, you can just glance at your one-page map for all your memory prompts. Finally, when you actually deliver the presentation, your mind will easily recall those color-coded branches, key words, and evocative cartoons you drew on your map.
Memory Mapping? Mind Mapping?

The term “memory mapping” has been used because this course focuses on learning and remembering. However, this diagraming technique was first developed in the early 1970s by Tony Buzan (1974) and was called “mind mapping.” Buzan applied the method not only to learning and reviewing material to be mastered, but also to thinking and pursuing creative ideas. Today, mind mapping is often used by groups and individuals in brainstorming, planning, and goal-setting sessions. It is a handy and very natural, “brainlike” way of developing and “parking” thoughts on any topic. Today, most people use the term “mind mapping” to mean both mind and memory mapping.