Content Unit 5:

Learning strategies

access
2learn

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR YOUR LEARNING PROCESS

Learning can sometimes be really hard. And we all know the situation whereby we think that we have successfully learned a topic and a few days later, we cannot remember anything we have learned.

But learning doesn't have to be that exhausting and complicated. By considering different aspects and strategies, **learning can be much easier than we think!**

Thus, in this content unit, you will receive numerous tips on how you can learn yourself as successfully and long term as possible. You will find out why it is useful to know **what way of learning is easiest** for you. As learning makes much more fun when doing it in a pleasant atmosphere, it is explained what you could do to **make your learning place more comfortable**. You will also learn how you could **organise your learning materials** and how to **stay concentrated** during learning, especially in class. **Independent learning** and how to remember things by using **memory strategies** are also important parts of this content unit.

1.1 What type of learner are you?

Not everyone prefers to learn in the same way. As different as the personalities of different people are, so are the **learning styles** they cope with best.

For a long time, attempts have been made to group these different learning styles into "learning types". One of the best-known and oldest models divides learners into the following types:

Visual types

Auditory types

Haptic/ Motoric types

Intellectual/ communicative types
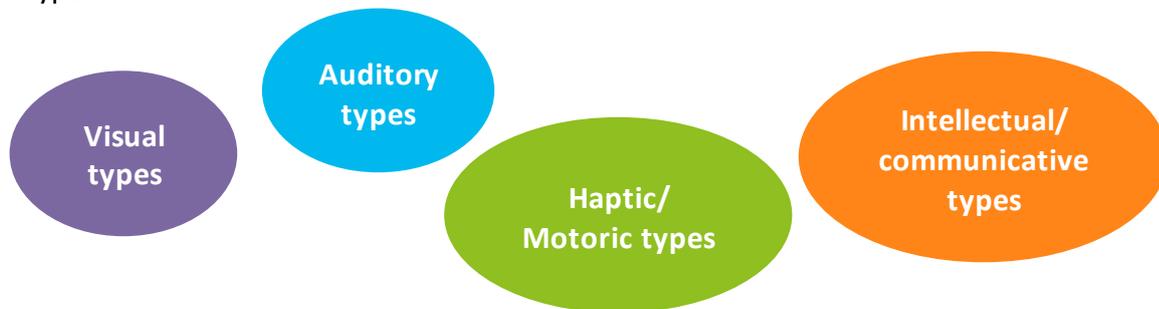
The assumption is made that some people learn best by seeing (visual), but others learn best by hearing (auditory), others by trying something out (haptic/motoric) or talking and thinking about it (intellectual/communicative).

In the meantime, however, we know that the whole thing is not that simple and that human learning cannot be put into categories so easily. From biology, for example, we know that people absorb most information through the eyes (seeing), followed by the skin (feeling) and ears (hearing). It is therefore biologically very unlikely that someone learns almost exclusively through hearing, for example.

Moreover, it is only one aspect of how we gather information (i.e. by seeing, hearing...) - but it is quite another thing **that happens to it in our brain**. Learning is not only about perceiving a new thing but also about understanding and remembering it.

> Learning is not only seeing, hearing or feeling, but also understanding and remembering.

In general, it is a good idea to consider **different sensory channels** when learning. For the vast majority of people, it is the case that they cope better with different learning channels depending on the situation, for example: I learn best how the new coffee machine works by

trying it out and making coffee with it (haptically). I understand difficult connections in politics and society best when someone explains them to me - e.g. in a podcast/television interview (auditory). To learn how an engine works, on the other hand, I need to see pictures or, preferably, a real engine to be able to imagine the different parts (visual).

The best and most sustainable way to learn something new is to engage with the topic in different ways and through different sensory channels (**multi-channel learning**): i.e. with pictures and text, as well as with spoken explanations, talking about it, thinking about it and trying it out yourself.

Practical relevance

John is currently attending a course to become a health and fitness trainer. When learning for the different course modules, he uses different senses: He learns about anatomy of the body and a healthy, balanced diet with the help of a book, by looking at pictures and reading through explanations. But to understand the correct execution of different exercises, he goes to the gym. There, he observes his trainer when she does the exercises, tries them out himself, and then asks him to explain what he could improve. This is the easiest way for him to learn for the different course modules.

Observe yourself and find out in which situations which **learning strategy** helps you best. There are also tests on the internet that give indications of which learning styles suit you best, e.g. here: https://www.proprofs.com/quiz-school/personality/quizreport.php?title=vak-quiz-visual-auditory-kinesthetic&sid=MjA3MTQ5ODYz. In the following table, you will find a collection of learning strategies and corresponding methods that you can combine appropriately.

kinaesthetic	try things out, do exercises, work with aids (e.g. flashcards), prepare mini-presentations, hold discussion groups
auditory	listen to lectures, podcasts/radio programmes, read texts aloud, create own sound recordings

read/write	read books/scripts, handouts, newspaper/blog articles, create summaries, highlight text
visual	look at photos and videos, look at drawings/sketches/models or make them yourself, visualise everything and build "mnemonic bridges".

It is important that you learn in the way that works best for you - regardless of what methods other people use.

Reflection

What type of learner are you? Try out different methods when learning in future and try to find the best strategy for you!

1.2 Creating a pleasant learning environment

1.2.1 The right workplace

Not only your learning materials but also the right workplace is important for your learning success! What does a good workplace look like?

- **quiet:** To concentrate, you should not be distracted by loud noises or conversations, if possible. Ideally, you should be alone at home, in a park or in a café, or only with people who also want to concentrate. If you don't find such a place, headphones can sometimes help to block out the environment better. If you are studying for a course, your training provider may offer study rooms at the course location.

> Tip: Public libraries are also quiet places, usually with some tables you can use for studying.

- **organised:** Concentration suffers when you sit in the middle of chaos. Therefore, the environment should also be "calm" for the eyes. The less inputs we receive from the environment around us, the more energy we have to concentrate on what we are learning. Not only should work documents be sorted and well-filed, the place should also be tidy. Remove laundry, dishes or rubbish from the workplace before studying.

- **ergonomic:** Sitting in one position for a long time is strenuous for the body. Therefore, you should make sure that your sitting position is healthy and does not put too much strain on your back, neck and shoulders. This also depends on your chair and table, the setting of your monitor and how you hold your hands when working with the mouse and keyboard. A bad sitting position can not only lead to permanent physical damage and pain, but in the short term, you will also tire more quickly and headaches or back pain will likely appear, which are a barrier to learning.

> You can find more information on ergonomic sitting here:
> https://www.cmd-ltd.com/advice-centre/ergonomics/ergonomic-office-posture/

1.2.2   What else is important?

No matter where you work, you should ensure that you are **not disturbed or distracted**:

- Let other people in the same household know that you need a quiet workplace and do not want to be spoken to for a while.
- Put everything out of sight that can distract you.
- If you prefer to have some noise around you, you could try to turn on some calm music. This brings some noise, but isn't distracting for most people.
- Especially important: Switch your mobile phone to silent mode and put it out of sight and reach. Nothing else is as tempting as "quickly" reading a message or checking Facebook and Instagram. In doing so, your brain is repeatedly pulled out of work mode and other thoughts steal your concentration.

> **Practical relevance**
>
> Juan has to study for his French test next week. He already knows some vocabulary well, but he can't remember some of them. To be able to concentrate well, he locks himself in his office so that no one can disturb him. He has also bought noise-cancelling headphones so that he doesn't hear his children playing all the time. He has left his mobile phone in the living room so that he is not tempted to look at it.

If you are repeatedly interrupted while working or learning, the so-called **"saw blade effect"** occurs. The Saw-blade effect means that it is difficult to stay concentrated on what you are learning when you are continuously interrupted. Instead, your workflow is "sawed through" and you need time to gather your thoughts and get back to work. Every time you are interrupted, your concentration and also your motivation decrease. The more often this happens, the worse the result will be.

1.2.3   The right atmosphere in the course

It is not only distractions in the form of noise, clutter or interruptions that can prevent us from learning. Our social environment also has a great influence. We can learn well when we feel safe and are taken seriously. If, on the other hand, we are preoccupied with arguments or feel uncomfortable with the other people around us, we focus on the wrong things, and the brain does not get into "absorption mode". That is why teachers attach importance to a positive

atmosphere and respectful interaction in class. For this reason, common group rules are usually worked out at the beginning of a course to determine how to deal with each other and with possible conflicts in advance.

> We all contribute to a positive and productive learning atmosphere. Therefore, it is important that we all act according to defined rules and treat each other with respect.

Reflection

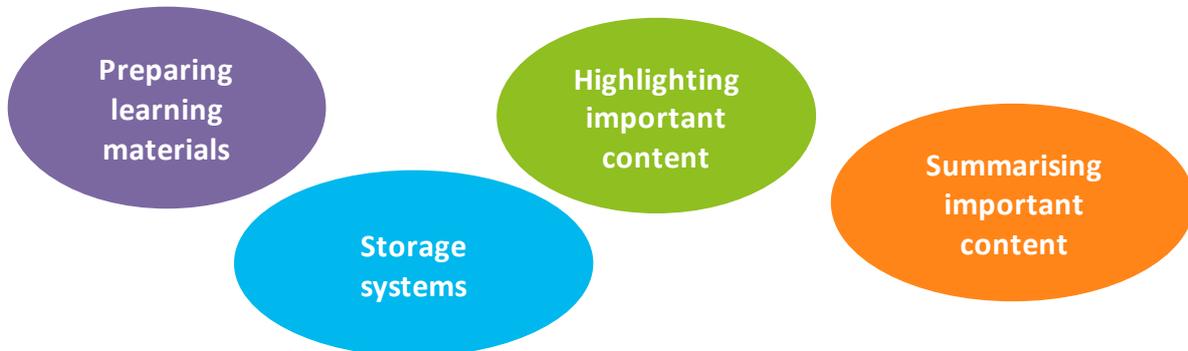Go to your learning place and compare it with what you have learned:

- Is the place and are all learning materials well-organised?
- Is this place quiet?
- Is there enough distance between your learning place and other people living in the household?
- Is it comfortable to sit at your desk?

If you answer one of the questions above with "no", re-arrange your learning place in to make learning easier for you in future!

1.3 Prepare your learning materials

You want to learn something – but what happens now? How can you start and what is important for learning? Below you will find an overview of:

Preparing learning materials

Storage systems

Highlighting important content

Summarising important content

1.3.1 Preparing learning materials

Do you know this situation: You are ready to start learning, but you are sitting in front of your documents and don't know how to begin?

A good first step is to sort all your learning materials and create a system. Learning materials are all the books, scripts, handouts, digital content, etc. that you need to achieve your learning outcome - e.g. to prepare for a final exam.

Have a good look at the amount of material you have to study and go through it very quickly by just looking at the names of the chapters, handouts, etc. It might take a few minutes, but it is very helpful for a positive learning outcome.

Why is this important? You get an overview of which materials are the basis for your learning, how extensive they are and where you can find them.

1.3.2 Storage systems

To ensure that you have all learning materials available and don't have to search for them every time, it is advisable to think of a system for how and where you store your documents.

One possibility is to use specially designed storage and filing systems, such as compartments on a shelf or the desk. These can be bought in many different forms in the office or stationery shops.

Example

Stackable compartments can be labelled individually and are well suited for sorting printed documents or scripts and storing them in a space-saving way.

Of course, you can also use everything you already have at home (drawers, boxes,...) and come up with your own system.

When planning a storage system, it always depends on how large the amount of your documents is and how clear they are: A single book on your desk does not need to be stored as neatly as a collection of five different scripts and a stack of handouts.

To sort a large amount of unbound paper (e.g. printed/copied documents, worksheets, etc.), (**ring) binders** are best suited. When individual sheets are arranged in a folder, they remain in the correct order, do not slip and do not get folded or creased. Even within folders, individual chapters or topics can be easily divided with the help of dividers.
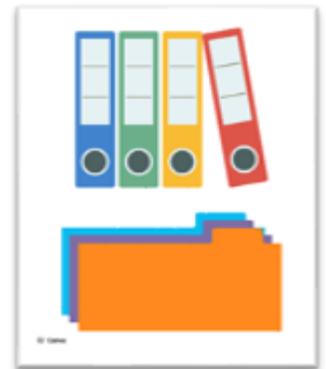
If you want to keep flashcards (e.g. for vocabulary) or information on different topics sorted, **index boxes** with different registers are a good option. Registers function similarly to dividers and are labelled, e.g. alphabetically by the first letter.

If the content of a book or script is not visible directly on the cover, or if you want to make notes on them (e.g. when you want to learn/repeat the content), you do not have to write directly on the documents, but you can use **Post-Its**: These small sticky notes can be easily removed or re-stickered and can thus also help to maintain an overview.

1.3.3 Highlighting and summarising important content

Do you have all the documents sorted and ready to use? Then you can start with the learning process. But most books and scripts contain much more text than you can actually remember. It is therefore crucial to distinguish between the important and the unimportant information and to concentrate on learning the really important things.

But how can you know what is important? To find out what is important, you can ask yourself the following questions:

- What information will I need to pass the exam? What advice have I received in this regard?
- What do I need for my life (professional or private) in the future?

To make important things and keywords more visible, you can **mark** them in the text, e.g. with a highlighter pen.

It's advisable not to highlight every piece of information that you think is important the first time you read it. It would be better for you to read first (maybe a paragraph or half a page), analyse the text and what is important, read it again, and then make your choice of those words that really need highlighting. This will avoid you from highlighting too much text, which could be very counterproductive.

By doing so, you will spend more time reading, but you will also be more effective and will retain the information faster, better, and for a longer period of time.

If you already stop to mark important things while reading a text (e.g. after each paragraph or page), you read the text more attentively and it is easier to remember the content.

Another way to filter out the essential information is to write your own **summary.** In doing so, you shorten the original text considerably or describe the most important contents in your own words. You can use whole sentences or just keywords.

Keywords are single words or groups of words that already have most of the necessary meaning in them. They are often used when one does not have much space or time to write and read.

Example

Instead of "We are meeting for dinner tonight at 6pm at Restaurant Italiano", you could only write the keywords "Dinner tonight 6pm Italiano" in your notepad.

Since you know the context, these few words are enough for you to remember all the information. You don't need the rest of the sentence. You can do something similar when summarising learning texts. However, make sure that you do not leave out too much, otherwise you might not be able to understand the meaning afterwards.

Besides filtering out what is important, marking important information and summarising it has another huge advantage: You think about what is important, what could be possible exam questions, which keywords you should write down or you write your own summaries. In this way, **you deal with the learning material much more intensively than if you just read through the text**.

This alternating thinking, reading and writing ensure that you perceive the material on several "channels" at once, which works much better than learning with only one "channel".

By the way: You could also write keywords directly with a pencil in the book or script - for example in the margin. This will make it easier for you to find a section of text again, for example when you are searching for an explanation of a particular topic. Another benefit of taking notes directly in the book or script is that you can add additional information from another source to have all the info on a topic in one place.

Reflection

How could you arrange your learning materials, so that it is easy to find everything quickly? Try it out!

Is it easy for you to highlight and/or summarise important contents? If not, take an article you find and practise that!

1.4 Learning in face-to-face courses

One possibility for learning is in a face-to-face course. This can be held e.g. in a school, training centre or also online. Learning in face-to-face courses is mostly organised in groups.

Traditionally, teaching in class takes place as so-called **frontal teaching:** While one person (the teacher) speaks and conveys the content, the group listens. This method, however, offers little room for the learners to become active and engage with the learning material themselves. For this reason, large group teaching is no longer conducted in a purely frontal manner, but in a mixed form: lecture, discussion, work assignments, individual and group work alternate. The aim is that the participants also have to deal with the topics independently because this is the only way to remember in the long term.

1.4.1 Advantages and disadvantages of face-to-face courses

Learning in face-to-face courses offers the advantage that the content is mostly predetermined and thus it is easy to control what is learned. They are therefore well suited when a certain minimum knowledge needs to be imparted in order to pass an exam, for example. The predefined structure in a course group with a teacher also makes it easier for people who cannot organise themselves well. In addition, participants can learn working methods and presentation techniques from the teacher.

The disadvantage of learning in class is that in large groups, less attention can be paid to the individual person and it can become exhausting over time to follow what is going on in class attentively.

Also, the bigger the group, the more difficult it is for the teacher or trainer to focus on individual learners and adapt the teaching to them.

1.4.2   Maintaining concentration

Often it is not that easy to maintain concentration in such a course. To increase it, you can do several things (much of this also applies to other learning settings):

- **Put yourself in "work mode".** Our body and mind are "creatures of habit". Find a ritual or routine before the start of each training session. This will signal to your body that it's time to start working and get your brain active.

> **Example**
>
> For example, you could get a glass of water, clean your glasses or prepare your writing materials to signalise that you start learning.

- **Reduce stress and distractions.** Focus your attention only on what is happening in the course for the duration of the course. Put the mobile phone on silent mode and out of sight. Turn off notifications on your computer. As far as possible, try to leave all other issues and problems outside the door.
- **Order helps the brain to focus**. Keep your learning place tidy, e.g. put only necessary documents on the table in front of you, throw away rubbish, etc.
- **Think in pictures!** Try to visualise things the speaker is explaining with the help of your imagination. You will notice that you not only listen more attentively but also remember everything much longer and more easily.
- **Body and mind are connected!** Movement has a positive effect on the brain. Make sure you sit in an upright, attentive position. But it is even more important to change your position regularly.

> **Example**
>
> Use breaks to stand up and walk around the room or out into the fresh air. This provides the brain with oxygen and helps with concentration.

- **Write down keywords!** Taking notes has many advantages. You automatically keep your attention on the person speaking, your hands move, and you can reread the most important things at home. Make sure that the notes are legible and that you still know the context in which you wrote something down, e.g. by writing the date and the name of the module.
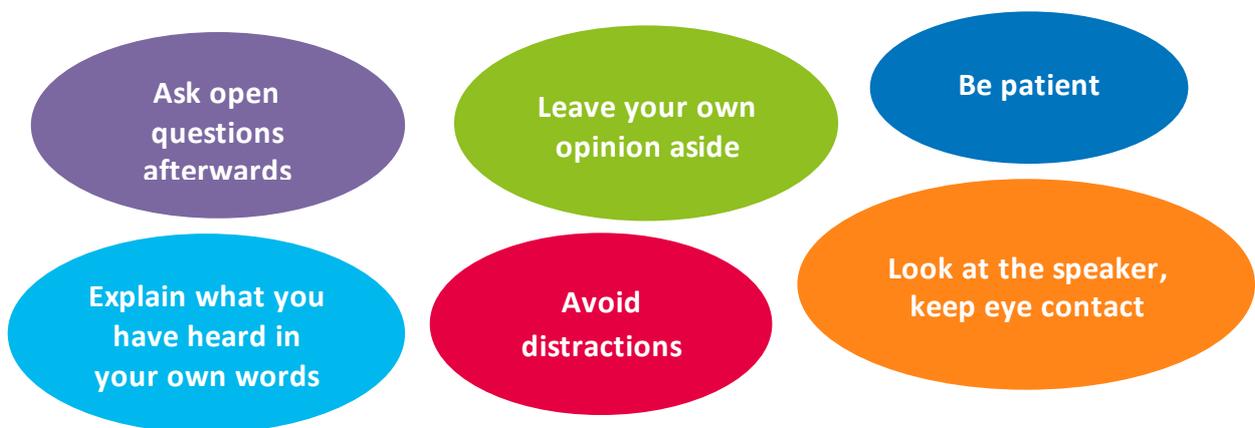
1.4.3 Active listening

When actively listening, you try to listen to another person in such a way that you really understand what they are saying.

> When implementing this kind of listening, you should not immediately think about your answer or interrupt the other person. Concentrate on what the person is saying to you.

You should also implement this in face-to-face courses. Because you will only gain the maximum benefit if you concentrate fully on the teacher and actively listen to him or her.

But how can you listen actively?

Ask open questions afterwards

Leave your own opinion aside

Be patient

Explain what you have heard in your own words

Avoid distractions

Look at the speaker, keep eye contact

Practical relevance

Julia is attending a course on accounting. The trainer is explaining a calculation example to her. To make sure that Julia really understands what he is explaining, she looks into his eyes and also on the example, and then repeats the most important points in her own words. She also asks him two short questions about what she has not yet fully understood.

1.4.4 Independent engagement with the learning content

To remember the learning content better, it is important that you not only listen to the teacher but also deal with the content yourself. This way you absorb important information through several channels and repeat what you have already learned at the same time.

Among other things, you have the following possibilities to deal with the learning material independently:

- Re-read chapters from your book/script that were covered in the course and highlight the most important contents or summarise them.
- Take notes when the teacher explains important things. You can also read through them again later, e.g. when you are preparing for an exam.
- If you haven't fully understood something yet, you could search for learning videos or other further information online.
- Repeat practical tasks at home to see if you have really understood them (e.g. calculation examples or gymnastics exercises).
- Meet colleagues to talk about the content and open questions.

Practical relevance

John, who is studying to become a health and fitness trainer, learns most easily by marking the content his trainer addresses during the class in his script and reading them again at home. He writes notes about additional information in the script. To do fitness exercises correctly, he watches videos on the internet and then does them himself in front of a mirror. He asks a friend to support him.

Reflection

What do you prefer – face-to-face or online courses? What are the advantages of both in your eyes?

Do you prefer to learn on your own or do you prefer to learn in class with a lot of involvement of the teacher? What are the benefits of learning independently? What are the challenges and what could you do to overcome these challenges?

1.5 Tips for autonomous learning

Learning is not only possible in large or small groups. You can also learn on your own. This learning setting is probably the most common. After all, you can learn at your own pace, you don't have to coordinate with anyone and you can start when it suits you best. Learning without guidance from a teacher or colleagues can be challenging, but it can also bring many advantages.

This is what you should keep in mind when you study independently:

- Alone, you are more flexible than when working with others. However, this also means that the temptation to postpone learning or to finish it more quickly is very great. Therefore, set yourself fixed times that you want to use for learning and stick to them. A written study plan can help (to find out how to create a study plan, have a look at subchapter 1.2 "Tips and tricks for your exam preparation" of CU4 „Time Management".
- Ensure suitable framework conditions such as a clean workplace and quiet. Avoid possible distractions, such as the mobile phone on the desk.

When you learn on your own, there is no one to recite to you or test you. So how does your brain get the information?

- **Absorbing information:** Whether you are reading a text, listening to podcasts/lectures or watching a video, your brain is absorbing the information. Much like when a friend gives you a piece of news.
- **Remembering information:** Of course, we cannot remember everything we have read or heard only once. So help your brain to "store" the information, e.g. by reading or playing a passage several times: the more often you read or practise, the more it sticks in your brain. You can also use memorisation techniques such as the letter method or make notes in your own words.

- **Evaluating learning progress:** When you think you have learned everything, check your own learning. You can do this, for example, by covering a section of text and describing the content in your own words. Index cards or sample tests are also an effective way to check your own learning progress. When you have reached your learning goal, take a short break - your brain is happy about a short breather and successes can be celebrated. Maybe you could even take a little nap. The brain needs sleep to effectively store new information in the long term memory.

By the way: learning often happens quite unintentionally in everyday life. If someone explains something to you, you watch an interesting documentary, try out a new recipe, listen to a report on the radio or read an exciting article in the newspaper or on the internet, then you have already learned something!

1.5.1 Set learning objectives

It is advisable to set learning goals and **write** them **down.** Then you can always see at a glance what you want to achieve and why you are learning. But what can such goals look like?

Learning objectives should be SMART:

S **specific**	What you want to achieve should be described precisely and it should be easily understandable.
M **measurable**	Criteria have to be defined that must be met in order to achieve the goal. These must be measurable (e.g. positive completion of the exam; being able to type one full page of text within 5 minutes by implementing the 5 finger typing,...).
A **achievable**	Set goals in a way that they are ambitious but still realistically achievable.
R **relevant**	The learning objective must also be important and motivating for yourself.
T **terminated**	Find particular dates or times by which the goal should be achieved.

An example for a SMART goal related blended learning could be:

"Until the online lesson in two weeks, Juan has learned chapters 1 and 2 (which is 15 pages) of the script about data privacy he received from his teacher Julia."

- **Specific:** The goal is to be able to remember the content of these two chapters in two weeks.
- **Measurable:** He can track his progress by counting the pages he already learned.
- **Achievable:** As he doesn't have many additional appointments, it is doable to learn these 15 pages in two weeks.
- **Relevant:** As he is very interested in how to protect his personal data, the learning content is important for himself.
- **Terminated:** He has two weeks to accomplish this goal.

1.5.2   Information procurement

When you are enrolled in a course or registered for an exam, there is usually a list of predefined learning materials or exam material. You start with this. For example, the learning material can be specified as follows:

- **Reference books:** Experts write a book with all the important information on a topic. The topic can be, for example, a scientific subject, a description of work techniques or a guide to systematically learning a language.
- **Scripts:** Scripts are usually developed to accompany a specific course, university lecture, etc. and contain a summary of relevant information for reference. They are like a handout for the whole course.
- **eContents:** In today's world, almost everything is digital. That's why there are no longer only printed materials, but also digital. Digital learning content can usually be accessed directly via the Internet and can therefore be used anywhere. Digital learning materials offer great opportunities because they can contain not only text but also, for example, videos, audios or interactive exercises.

There is a table of contents in almost all materials. If you are looking for a specific topic, you can use it as a guide and find information more quickly. If you get stuck with the materials provided, need more information or simply want to learn something new all by yourself, you can easily search for your own sources.

1.5.3 Problem-solving in autonomous learning

While independent learning brings many benefits, it also brings some challenges. While you can choose when and where you want to learn (and often what you want to learn), it is not always possible for us to continue learning without help from others, either because of technical problems or because we just do not understand certain subject areas.

In such situations, it is important that you admit to yourself that you need help from someone else. It is neither good for you nor your trainer or teacher if you do not ask for help and therefore cannot continue learning.

People you could contact in this case are:

- Your trainer
- Your colleagues
- Your family members
- Your friends

Depending on the situation, one of the people mentioned can certainly support you.

> **Practical relevance**
>
> Maria is taking an online course on interior design. The course lasts for one year and she can choose when she wants to work on which topics. She starts reading through the scripts and solving the practical exercises. When trying to upload an exercise, she notices that the upload does not work. In addition, she is not quite sure what exactly she has to hand in for the second exercise.
>
> In order to continue working, she writes to her trainer asking if he could help her upload her exercise document. She asks Caroline, a colleague from the same course, for help with the second problem. Since both the trainer and her colleague answer her the same evening, she can continue working on the course the very next day.

You could also ask some of your colleagues if they are interested in creating a **learning team**. It is always a good feeling when we know that we don't have to manage difficult learning phases alone. You could support each other, exchange ideas, share different views and learn from each other. Thus, it is easier to solve problems. You can work together in face-to-face

lessons, but especially also in self-learning phases. This is not only something you could benefit from, but also many other people will be happy about this possibility.

If you want to find out more about learning in a team, you can check out CU6 "Personal Well-Being", subchapter 2 "Learning in a team".

> There is nothing to be ashamed of if you need help from your trainer or colleagues, because it is normal that we cannot solve everything on our own. The important thing is that you have the courage to ask questions and ask for help!

1.5.4　Keep a learning diary

You are now already in the middle of the learning process, but after a few days, you are suddenly no longer sure what you actually learned on days 1 and 2? And what was the issue you wanted to ask the trainer?

It is easy to lose track when you have to learn a lot. Keeping a **learning diary** is a good way to prevent this.

There are no formal requirements for a learning diary. You can keep your diary in every way that suits you - whether on paper, digitally, in detail or very briefly. However, it makes sense to make an entry for each learning day and to add the corresponding date. In the learning diary, you can document …

- what you have learned on this day.
- what questions and ambiguities have arisen: What do you want to find out or repeat in more detail, what do you want to ask the teacher?
- how long it took you, what was particularly easy or difficult for you.
- if you had a particular success/breakthrough in learning.

When keeping a learning diary, you always see **your learning progress.** You know exactly when you have done a certain task or learned a specific item, and will not forget important questions. By reflecting while writing, you become even more deeply involved with the learning material. In addition, you get to know yourself much better: You notice whether you are making as good progress as you had planned, or whether you should revise your learning plan a little more because you need more or less time. You find out what is particularly easy for you and what is not. This knowledge can help you with all the tasks that lie ahead of you in the future. Another big advantage is that the learning diary allows you to keep track of what you have already achieved and you always have a sense of success.

Below, you can find an example of a learning diary template. You can find many other templates on the internet that you can easily download and print or fill in digitally.

Learning Diary

Name:

Term: | My Key Worker:

What am I good at?
(To be completed over time)

What do I need to Work on?
(To be completed over time)

What do I like doing the most in my lessons?

What do I dislike doing in my lessons?

Where might I need a little help?

SOS

Source: https://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/student-learning-diary-student-learning-log-12447853

1.5.5 Linking learning to the real world

Usually, we are more motivated to learn when we can connect the content with our real life and when we know that it is relevant to us. It is also easier for us to remember things when we have already applied things in practice because then, our brain knows that this is important to us.

When learning something, you should always **think about situations in your life in which you might need the acquired knowledge or skills.** This could be at your workplace, but also at home or when being together with other people. Then, try to find out how you could act to implement what you learned, and take action. Afterwards, you should evaluate the effectiveness of applying the content and, if necessary, improve your actions.

Here, you can find some examples for application in real life:

Learning a language

You can go to a person who is able to speak the language and talk to this person. Or you can write a text or watch movies in this language.

Content creation skills

You can try to create your own documents, for example to do lists or a CV. You could also do some social media posts.

Conflict management

Is there a conflict in your family or between your friends? Try to solve the conflict with your acquired skills.

Time Management

When learning for your next course, you can apply your time management skills. You can set goals, create a learning plan, prioritise learning content, etc.

Data privacy skills

You could go to your social media accounts and change data privacy settings according to what you learned.

It might take some time to find strategies to apply learning content in your life, but after some practising, you will see that it's getting easier. So, stay positive – you are able to do it!

Reflection

Think of the course you are attending at the moment or you would like to attend in future. What are your goals of doing this course? Write these goals on a list and remember to formulate them as **SMART goals**!

1.6 Memory strategies

When learning something new, it is important that we find strategies to keep this new information in our brains for as long as possible. Our learning should be sustainable. Below, you can find some tips for sustainable learning. In addition, you will get to know some techniques that support you in remembering things.

1.6.1 Sustainable learning

For your brain to store and retrieve information in long-term memory, the following things are important:

- **Motivation:** Only the information that your brain considers important is passed on to your long-term memory. This is also the reason why you learn things you are interested in much more easily. "Motivation" is the key word. If you are interested in a subject and if you know what you will use this information for, then you are motivated to learn. So, to learn in the long term, you put your brain in readiness mode: "Attention, here comes something important! I want to remember this!"
- **Attention:** What you want to learn should get your full attention and concentration at that moment. Imagine you are looking at your mobile phone and reading WhatsApp messages while listening to a speaker. The risk is very high that your brain will filter out the speaker's words as unimportant because your attention is on your mobile phone. So help your brain to filter the right information by consciously concentrating on what you want to learn.
- **Repetition:** To remember things you have to recall them again and again - in other words, repeat what you have learned. You can imagine this as a path through a meadow: If you walk the path once, you may only see a few bent blades of grass. But the more often you walk the path, the more clearly it becomes visible until it becomes a real trail that you can easily find again. If you have walked the path hundreds of times, it will be so well-trodden that you will have no trouble finding it again, even after a long time. This is exactly how it works with learning: in the beginning, you have to repeat new information many times in order to remember it, but at some point, the path will be so familiar that the information is always available. So it's not how long you learn, but how often.

- **Find connections:** If I ask you to remember the words "donkey - cow - chicken" and recite them to me after 5 minutes, you will probably manage this easily. If, on the other hand, I ask you to remember "Plinu - Gah - Ahrt", after a short time you will no longer know which words I have told you. The big difference is whether the words have a meaning for you or not. If you hear "donkey - cow - chicken" your brain knows that these are animals. You also know what these animals look like and that they live on a farm. You may even have a childhood memory of one of the animals. So, because there is a lot of connected information, it is easy for your brain to store and also retrieve this information. This principle is called a "knowledge network": You learn most easily when you link the information with other knowledge and experiences you already have.

To be able to remember what we have learned before, different memorisation techniques have been developed. The principle behind these techniques is always the same: Our brain remembers stories and images much more easily than individual words. This can be consciously exploited in learning if you know how.

A generic term for these memory techniques is *mnemonics*. In the following sections, you will get to know some of these techniques and how they work.

1.6.2   First letter method/mnemonic sentences

The first letter method is used to remember concepts (e.g. words, names, ...) in a certain order.

The **first letters of the terms** are used to form a simple sentence. This sentence can be meaningless, funny or absurd - the important thing is that it is easy to remember.

The sentence "**M**Y **V**ERY **E**DUCATED **M**OTHER **J**UST **S**ENT **U**S **N**OODLES" helps to remember the planets in our solar system - in the correct order, sorted by distance from the sun: Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune.

There are also mnemonic sentences that do not use the first letters but are still easy to remember, e.g. through **rhymes** or **word games.**

This rhyme is used to memorise the four cardinal directions:
IN EAST, THE SUN WILL START THE DAY,
THEN GO ALONG THE SOUTHERN WAY,
TILL IT WILL SET IN WEST AT NIGHT,
FROM NORTH YOU'LL NEVER SEE ITS'S LIGHT.

The best way to use the first letter method or mnemonic sentences is to create a little story around it and imagine the situation (e.g. you are sunbathing for the whole day during your holidays somewhere in Europe and see the sun rising and going down with a cool drink in your hand).

You can simply make up your own mnemonic sentences with initial letters for your learning contents. Your sentences do not have to follow any rules or make sense to anyone else. As long as the sentence helps you remember, it is effective.

1.6.3 Storytelling method

The storytelling method works in a similar way to the mnemonic method, except that you do not limit yourself to one short sentence: You **think up a short story** and **incorporate words or numbers** you want to remember. You imagine the story visually, which makes it much easier to remember. Again, the more absurd and strange the story, the better you will remember it.

Think of the eight planets of the solar system. You could create a story around these planets, so that you can remember their distance to the sun:

The sun is shining and I have an appointment at **Merkur Insurance**. Next to the entrance is a large poster advertising **Venus razors**. Suddenly the woman in the poster moves, throws a handful of **earth** at me and asks me if I have a **Mars chocolate bar.** She needs this for her friend **Jupiter** because when he is hungry he throws **sat**ellites (**Saturn**). I run away to tell my **u**ncle (**Uranus**) called **Neptune** about this situation.

1.6.4   Number Picture Method

If you want to remember number combinations, the number picture method is particularly suitable. Here, too, the principle is used so that the brain remembers pictures better than individual numbers or letters.

The method works like this: For **each number from 1 to 9, pick a symbol (picture)** that reminds you of this number, e.g. because the shape is similar. For example, 0 = egg, 1 = candle, 2 = swan, 3 = glasses, ...

Then incorporate the symbols into a story or sentence as described in the other methods.

Example

Your new PIN for your credit card is 2301. You remember the following story:
A **swan** wearing **glasses** lays an **egg** and ceremoniously lights a **candle.**

With a little practice, you can easily remember long sequences of numbers, such as telephone numbers or ID numbers. This works best if you always use the same symbols. Pick your own symbols that are obvious to you personally.

1.6.5 Loci method

"Loci" is the Latin word for "places". The loci method is used to remember terms, arguments, etc. in the right order. To do this, you use familiar places or routes such as your own house or the way to work. The only thing you need is a lot of imagination: you take a **"fantasy trip" to the place you have chosen**. In doing so, you connect conspicuous landmarks or objects with previously determined words. Then, when you want to remember the words, imagine **walking** along the imaginary **path** again and **"collecting" the linked words.**

Example

You want to remember the eight planets using the loci method. To do this, you go for a walk around your flat in your imagination.

You start in front of the bedroom window and see the sun. You walk past the bed and place **Mercury** (e.g. a model of the planet or the written word) on the bedside table. You go further into the anteroom and step onto the carpet. There you place **Venus**. Continue the tour of your home in a fixed order and place the planets (e.g. **Earth** on the doormat, **Mars** in the snack drawer in the kitchen, **Jupiter in the** oven, **Saturn** on the TV, **Uranus** on the houseplant, **Neptune in the** shower). You go through this round several times in your head, always in the same order, and memorise the objects with the words. When you want to remember the planets later, you start the round again in your head and "collect" the words again.

Reflection

How can you remember things best? Try out at least three of the mnemonic methods! What is your preferred method?

1.7 Excursus: Learning languages

Learning a language is something special. Language is the "basic tool" with which people converse, make agreements, and even think. Without a language it would not be possible, for example, to tell your friend important news, to understand a TV programme or to negotiate when buying a car.

So, learning languages is not just about factual knowledge, but about being able to express yourself in everyday life and understand other people. A new language can open up a whole new world. For example, when we learn English, it allows us to talk to people from nearly all over the world and it gives us access to a myriad of knowledge (news, books, social media postings, etc.).

> Did you know that there are over 7.000 languages worldwide? The five most commonly spoken languages are Mandarin (Chinese), Spanish, English, Hindi and Arabic.

Each of us has learned at least one language without thinking about it - our mother tongue!

> The mother tongue is the language we learn naturally in our lives from the very beginning, e.g. because it is spoken in our family and everywhere in everyday life. We learn to speak in this language as small children: first in individual words ("no", "mummy", etc.) and then in whole sentences. There are also people who speak a second language in addition to their mother tongue nearly equally well, e.g. because a different language is spoken at home or there are two languages in the family, and thus they learn both languages automatically.

When we want to learn a new language as teenagers or adults, it is much more difficult because our brain is used to functioning with our mother tongue. If you have ever been in a country with a different language (e.g. on holiday in a country where they don't speak your language), you know how difficult it can be to communicate in a new language.

Luckily, there are techniques for learning languages that help your brain in the process! Below, you can find some of them explained.

1.7.1 Passive listening

Can language learning occur just by listening? It sounds too simple, but it works - and not only for babies! By listening to films or audiobooks, for example, bit by bit your brain will recognise the structure of the spoken language and also learn the pronunciation. This then makes "active" language learning (practising vocabulary and grammar etc.) much easier. If you are already advanced, passive listening also helps to increase your understanding of the language and to discover new vocabulary, idioms etc. The more often you listen to the language, the easier it will be to learn, and the more natural your own use of the language will become.

1.7.2 Flashcard systems

Flashcards are a classic way to learn vocabulary. All you need are small paper cards (you can get them in any stationery shop, or simply cut them yourself). On one side of the card, you write the word in your mother tongue, and on the other side the translation in the language you want to learn. Now you can test yourself by looking at only one side and trying to name the correct answer on the back. This works both ways, e.g. mother tongue → English and English → mother tongue.

Another advantage of flashcards is that you can sort and group the cards for learning as you like: e.g. by topic, in groups of 7-10 vocabulary words each, by difficulty, etc.

> Flashcards are also suitable for learning or for specific exam preparation if it is not about vocabulary. For example, you can write a keyword on one side and related facts or mathematical formulas on the other.

1.7.3 Keyword technique

The keyword method is also one of the mnemonics and is based on the principle that pictures are better stored in the brain than words and numbers. So you need your imagination again.

The method is good for learning vocabulary and works in two steps: First, think of the word you want to learn. Then think of a word in your mother tongue that sounds similar or reminds

you of the vocabulary word in some other way: this is the keyword. Now, as a second step, connect the vocabulary word with the keyword to form an image in your mind.

> **Example**
>
> You are learning the English word mice. It sounds pronounced like the German word Mais (= keyword). Now imagine how many little mice are nibbling on a corn cob. The next time you hear the vocabulary word, this process runs in your brain: mice sounds like corn -> mice nibbling on a corncob -> the translation is mice.

1.7.4   LAMP method

The LAMP method was developed in Canada. LAMP is the abbreviation for **"Language Acquisition Made Practical".**

The principle of the LAMP method is: Learn little but use the little a lot!

In concrete terms, this means that you prepare complete sentences or dialogues in a new language and then use them as often as possible, e.g. greeting phrases, conversations about the weather, shopping, etc. The advantage is that you learn all the vocabulary and expressions needed for a situation at once and can thus quickly use something in everyday life. At the same time, you train your pronunciation and lose your shyness about speaking in a new language.

For the LAMP method, you need **another person who already speaks the language**. This person should be able to speak the language at least at the same level as you do. This could be for example a classmate, a friend or a family member. If you know a native speaker, you could also ask this person.

> **Example**
>
> Someone who is learning German (A) starts with a greeting dialogue (with person B):
> A: Hello, how are you?
> B: Thank you, good! And you?
> A: I'm fine too, thank you!

The more often you play through a situation, the more confident you become. Over time, you will learn to make small changes, for example, because your partner answers something different than usual in the dialogue. Gradually, you will prepare new dialogues and sentences together, which you will practise with your language partner.

> **Example**
>
> When the practised dialogue no longer causes difficulties, the native speaker (B) begins to add variations, i.e. to change the usual flow:
> A: Hello, how are you?
> B: Thank you, I'm not feeling so well today. I feel ill.
> A (learns new answer): Oh, I'm sorry. Get well soon!

> If you do not have anyone with whom you can practise in person, the method can also be used online, e.g. via video telephony.

1.7.5 Immersion

As already mentioned, every one of us has already learned at least one language, our mother tongue. How could we manage this without any language courses or vocabulary tests? It is because we have acquired our mother tongue through the most natural language learning method in the world: immersion.

Immersion means "diving" into a language world, **"living" in that language:** We hear it from our parents, from people on the street, on TV and increasingly learn to express ourselves better and better. This is also the reason why people who live abroad for a few months learn the language there much faster and better than someone who does it from afar.

If you now want to learn a second or third language, you obviously cannot become a child again and "grow up" with the language. A long stay abroad is also often not realistic. But you can imitate natural language acquisition by taking **regular "language showers":** Talk to people who speak the language at a high or native level, get exposed to media such as radio, series or videos in the language, etc. Get into contact with the language as often as possible, even without actively learning. Immersion combines the principles of other methods such as passive listening or the LAMP method and you learn almost "by yourself".

1.8 Summary

If a person knows his/her successful way of learning, this doesn't necessarily mean that this would also be a successful way for another person. Each person prefers different kinds of learning. There are some who learn best when reading or listening to some content. Others might prefer to observe others, to visualise things or try out things on their own. Thus, it is important that you **try to find out what type of learning you are,** so that you can plan your future learning processes according to that and make learning easier for you.

For successful learning, it is also important that you **keep your learning place clean and quiet.** Thus, you can save a lot of time during learning and you feel much more comfortable when you are not distracted by anything. A positive atmosphere is also important when learning in class together with others. This means that we should act according to defined rules and **treat everybody with respect**.

By organising your learning materials, you can find them much easier if you need them. Storage systems can support you to **have all materials clearly arranged**. When you additionally **highlight and summarise the most important contents**, it makes learning much easier for you.

When learning in a face-to-face course, it might get a bit loud and you might easily be distracted by different things. To be able to benefit from such a course, you have to try to **keep your concentration high** and take away as much as possible, so that you don't have to learn that much at home. For example, you should try to keep stress low and to **actively listen** to your teacher. But even if the course is teacher-centred, you should **deal with the contents also on your own.** Because only when you put active effort in learning, you will be able to remember the important things.

Independent learning might be a bit difficult at the beginning. But by considering some things, it will always get easier and easier. It is important that you **carefully plan your learning process** and **set SMART goals**. Get an overview of what has to be learned and **don't be afraid of asking others** (your teacher or also colleagues) for help. By writing a **learning diary**, you can assess your learning process and make improvements for future learning. After some practising, you will be able to learn independently as well.

Sometimes, it is difficult to remember what we have already learned. So-called **"memory strategies"** can help us to remember things easier. There are a lot of different examples like

the first-letter method, the storytelling method or the loci method. For language learning, there are also some different methods that can be implemented for remembering vocabulary or improving pronunciation skills. **Try out different strategies to find the most useful strategy for you personally,** then learning becomes much easier.

2   SOURCES

Heerema, E. (2022). 9 Types of Mnemonics to Improve Your Memory. Available at: https://www.verywellhealth.com/memory-tip-1-keyword-mnemonics-98466

Martins, J. (2022). Aktives Zuhören: Die wichtigsten Tipps im Überblick! Available at: https://asana.com/de/resources/active-listening

Mind Tools Content Team (o.J.). VAK Learning Styles. Available at: https://www.mindtools.com/ak6cyjn/vak-learning-styles

Niels (2020). SMART-Lernziele formulieren 5 praktische Beispiele. Available at: https://www.ag5.com/de/smart-lernziele-beispiele/

www.access2learn.eu @access2blendedlearning @access-2-learn @access2learn