

Helping Your Child with Mnemonics

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) strengthens opportunities for students with disabilities to make progress in the general education curriculum. At the same time, the No Child Left Behind Act focuses on improving results for all students. Because of this emphasis on academic success, states are requiring achievement testing for students. The tests are used to help determine whether a child advances from grade to grade or graduates.

A child with a disability is expected to take tests along with his or her non-disabled classmates. The child may receive accommodations or modifications, if needed. Some children may take alternate assessments. Some may take tests that measure progress in alternate standards.

Your child must recall facts quickly and correctly to do well on tests. Of course, memory is not the same thing as understanding. However, children will have a hard time showing what they know if they cannot remember facts. These types of memory skills are difficult for many students with disabilities. Luckily, you can help your child learn ways to remember better.

Your child's memory for facts depends upon both information encoding and retrieval. Learning is the way your child puts information into his or her memory. This is called encoding information. Tests require your child to remember things he or she has learned. This is known as retrieval. While helping your child with homework, you can help the child to change the way he or she encodes information. Changing the way a child encodes information can lead to better retrieval - and better test scores.

Mnemonic (pronounced nih MA nihk) strategies are ways to help your child do a better job at storing information, or encoding. Then he or she will be able to do a better job retrieving it. Using these strategies, your child can relate the information he or she is learning to information already in long-term memory - information he or she already remembers. With a strong connection between the new and old information, your child can remember new information for a long time.

Examples of Mnemonic Techniques

The Keyword Method — This method pairs a new word with a keyword. This keyword sounds like the new word and can be easily pictured. The imagined picture shows the keyword interacting with the meaning of the word to be learned. For example, to remember that barrister is another word for lawyer, you could picture a bear in a courtroom.

The Pegword Method – This method is used when numbered or ordered information must be remembered. Pegwords are words that rhyme with numbers. A pegword is pictured with the information to be learned. For example, suppose you choose the pegword sticks to be the number six in your method. Then picturing insects walking on sticks would remind you that insects have six legs.

Letter Strategies – This strategy is used to remember a list of things. An acronym is created that is made up of the first letters of a list of items to be remembered. The first letters of the items create the acronym, and helps recall of the list of familiar items. It is easier to remember a one word acronym than all of words on the list. The acronym HOMES can be used to help students remember all the names of the Great Lakes (Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior).

Research shows that students with disabilities can learn to successfully use these mnemonic strategies. The studies show that using mnemonics results in better test scores for students across a wide range of grade levels and subjects.

Mnemonics is not used for all instruction. There are good ways to teach all subject areas that focus on more than memorization of facts. However, mnemonics is a teaching aid that can be used to help your child demonstrate what he or she has learned. This can lead to greater success in school.



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For more information on how to use these techniques, look for books about memory improvement or mnemonics.