

how memory works

memory

Make It Happen:

time management
 concentration
 reading
 listening
memory
 taking tests
 writing papers
 self-regulation
 learning styles
 motivation

Three stages of memory work together to allow learners to input, store, and retrieve information. Understanding these stages—and applying the tips below—will increase your ability to remember and use information from your classes.

Input

We take information in through our senses. With so much information coming at us all the time, we have to choose what to **capture**. In order to effectively capture:

- Be well rested so that you can focus clearly.
- Decrease distractions.
- Stay alert and engaged by taking notes.
- Key in on essential or important terms, points, or examples.

Storage

You've heard the phrase "Use it or lose it"—well, that's exactly what happens to information that comes in through your senses. If you want to move information you capture through working memory to long term memory, you have to *do* something with the information. To effectively retain information and recall it accurately:

- Connect the information to something you already know.
- Own it—put it into your own words.
- Organize information in a way that's meaningful for you. Create a memory cue (see below).
- Engage actively with the material. Quiz yourself, create a graphic organizer, or write and recite information.
- Review repeatedly, starting within an hour of first encountering the material and then again each day.
- Sleep 7-8 hours at night so your mind can effectively process new information.

Retrieval

In order for memory to be effective, you have to be able to recall information when you need it. If you've stored it thoughtfully, recall of material will be easier and more accurate. Often we use a memory "hook" or "cue" when we're storing information to help us recall. These cues can be mnemonic devices, visualizations, or associations. To effectively retrieve information:

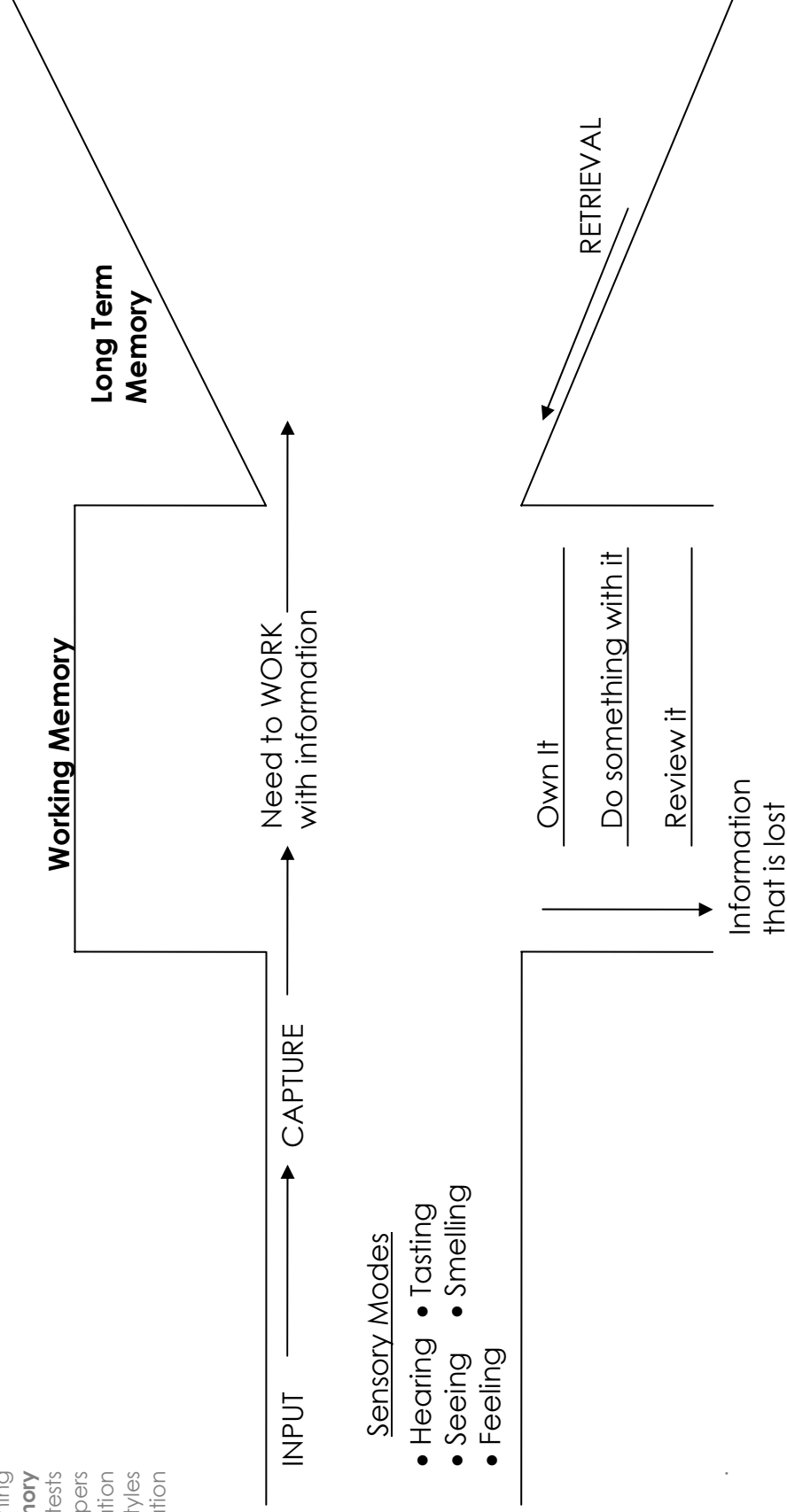
- Practice recalling information with and without cues.
- Simulate test conditions and test yourself.
- Teach another person the material.
- Enter testing situations alert and well rested.

Now that you've grasped how memory works, apply these strategies to note-taking, test-taking, and reading. Visit the Center for Learning for handouts on these and other memory-related skills.

Make It Happen:

- time management
- concentration
- reading
- listening
- memory**
- taking tests
- writing papers
- self-regulation
- learning styles
- motivation

Memory Diagram



© 1994 Linda Wagner