Mnemonics in Marketing: a Pedagogical Tool

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The popular mnemonic techniques are defined, classified, and described. Empirical evidence is cited supporting the effectiveness of mnemonic techniques in a variety of learning contexts. It is explained why mnemonics are effective. Then, a particular mnemonic technique, the first letter mnemonic, is selected to illustrate how the topic of questionnaire design can be taught using mnemonics. The use of mnemonics in classroom teaching is discussed with specific reference to teaching marketing research and other marketing courses.

DEFINITION AND CLASSIFICATION

Mnemonic techniques may be defined as learning strategies which can enhance the learning and improve later recall of information (Bellezza 1981). The mnemonic techniques that will be described in this paper are those that use cognitive cueing structures during both learning and recall. A framework for classifying mnemonic techniques is presented in Figure 1. This framework builds upon and represents a modification of the one proposed by Bellezza (1981). Following Bellezza (1981), mnemonic techniques may be broadly classified as those that primarily involve organizing operations and those that primarily involve encoding operations. An organizing operation associates or relates in memory seemingly unrelated units of information. An encoding operation involves a transformation of a unit of information so that it can then be more easily organized into some kind of a structure.

As shown in Figure 1, organizational mnemonics can be either multiple use or single use. Multiple use techniques make use of the same cueing structure to remember several different sets of information. In contrast, single use techniques employ a separate or distinct organizational mnemonic for each set of information that must be learned. Both multiple and single use techniques can be further classified as peg type or chain type. The peg type mnemonics use extrinsic cueing, such as a series of loci or a series of peg words. These extrinsic cues are not part of the information to be remembered. Before the mnemonic system can function, it is usually necessary to first memorize
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FIGURE 1
A Classification of Mnemonic Techniques

- **Organizational Mnemonic Techniques**
  - **Multiple Use**
    - Peg-type
      - Method of Loci
    - Chain-type
      - Word Encoding
        - Figure- Alphabet
      - Key-word
      - Acronym
      - Acrostics
  - **Single Use**
    - Peg-type
      - Pegword Mnemonics
    - Chain-type
      - Story Link Mnemonics
      - Link Mnemonics
      - Rhyme

- **Encoding Mnemonic Techniques**
  - **Multiple Use**
    - Peg-type
      - First-letter Mnemonics
    - Chain-type
      - Rhymes
  - **Single Use**
    - Word Encoding
    - Number Encoding
    - Procedure Encoding

this cuing structure. The popular multiple use, peg type techniques include the method of loci and the peg word mnemonic. The single use peg type techniques consist of first letter mnemonics comprising acronyms and acrostics. On the other hand, intrinsic cuing is used in chain type mnemonics. The cues which facilitate recall are part of the information items to be remembered. The intrinsic cuing structure, which may be visual or verbal, is associated with a sequence of items and acts like the interlocking links in a chain. The multiple use chain type mnemonics consist of story and link mnemonics. The single use chain type mnemonics are best described by rhymes.

Encoding mnemonic techniques involve the transformation of the information to be learned so that the information can be more easily remembered. Techniques have been developed for encoding words, numbers, and procedures. These techniques are, respectively, the key word, figure alphabet, and Yodai mnemonics. A brief description of each of these techniques follows.

**MNEMONIC TECHNIQUES**

**Method of Loci**

The first step in the method of loci is to memorize a familiar series of locations that follow a regular order. For example, one might imagine the distinct locations seen when entering the house after grocery shopping—the hallway, den, dining room, kitchen, the pantry, etc. These locations serve the purpose of pigeon holes for the items to be learned. Suppose a shopping list of bread, jam, cereal, butter, and milk is to be remembered. First, each item is converted into a visual image. Then the image of each item is placed in a specific location that has been visualized. Thus one might imagine: (1) a loaf of bread dropped in the hallway while carrying the groceries, (2) some jam on a shelf in the den, (3) a cereal box on the table in the dining room, (4) the butter kept in the refrigerator in the kitchen, and finally (5) a gallon of milk in the pantry. Each item in each location is visualized for about five or ten seconds. In order to recall the list, one simply takes a mental walk through the various locations to determine what has been placed in each one. Recent empirical studies pointing to the effectiveness of the method of loci include Anschutz et al. (1985), De Beni and Cornoldi (1985), and Kemp and van der Krogt (1985).

**Peg Word Method**

As indicated by its name, the peg word method involves the learning of a list of peg words that correspond to specific numbers. A list that has been commonly used for the first ten numbers is:

- One is a bun
- Two is a shoe
- Three is a tree
- Four is a door
- Five is a hive
- Six are sticks
- Seven is heaven
- Eight is a gate
- Nine is a line
- Ten is a hen

The learner is required to “hang” the items to be remembered on the pegs, with each item on one unique peg. The peg and the item are then visualized interacting with each other. Suppose the shopping list given earlier—bread, jam, cereal, butter, and milk—was to be remembered. The learner might create an image of a boy wanting to eat bread rather than a bun, a jam bottle breaking and spilling jam over a shoe, cereal being used as fertilizer for a tree, butter being used to grease the hinges of a door, and finally milk sweetened with honey from a hive. As a result of this visual interaction, the pairs become associated in the mind. When the list is to be recalled, the learner traces the peg words to determine what object had been visually hung on each peg. As in the case of locations in the method of loci, the pegs