

**Brill**

**IMPROVE YOUR  
MEMORY**

**JONATHAN HANCOCK**

**iant**



**brilliant**

**improve your  
memory**

## PEARSON

At Pearson, we believe in learning – all kinds of learning for all kinds of people. Whether it's at home, in the classroom or in the workplace, learning is the key to improving our life chances.

That's why we're working with leading authors to bring you the latest thinking and best practices, so you can get better at the things that are important to you. You can learn on the page or on the move, and with content that's always crafted to help you understand quickly and apply what you've learned.

If you want to upgrade your personal skills or accelerate your career, become a more effective leader or more powerful communicator, discover new opportunities or simply find more inspiration, we can help you make progress in your work and life.

Pearson is the world's leading learning company. Our portfolio includes the Financial Times and our education business, Pearson International.

Every day our work helps learning flourish, and wherever learning flourishes, so do people.

To learn more, please visit us at [www.pearson.com/uk](http://www.pearson.com/uk)



**brilliant**

# **improve your memory**

Jonathan Hancock

**PEARSON**

Harlow, England • London • New York • Boston • San Francisco • Toronto • Sydney • Auckland • Singapore • Hong Kong  
Tokyo • Seoul • Taipei • New Delhi • Cape Town • São Paulo • Mexico City • Madrid • Amsterdam • Munich • Paris • Milan

## PEARSON EDUCATION LIMITED

Edinburgh Gate  
Harlow CM20 2JE  
United Kingdom  
Tel: +44 (0)1279 623623  
Web: www.pearson.com/uk

First published as *Brilliant Memory Training* in 2011 (print and electronic)  
**Rejacketed edition 2015 (print and electronic)**

© Pearson Education Limited 2011, 2015 (print and electronic)

The right of Jonathan Hancock to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

The print publication is protected by copyright. Prior to any prohibited reproduction, storage in a retrieval system, distribution or transmission in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, permission should be obtained from the publisher or, where applicable, a licence permitting restricted copying in the United Kingdom should be obtained from the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS.

The ePublication is protected by copyright and must not be copied, reproduced, transferred, distributed, leased, licensed or publicly performed or used in any way except as specifically permitted in writing by the publishers, as allowed under the terms and conditions under which it was purchased, or as strictly permitted by applicable copyright law. Any unauthorised distribution or use of this text may be a direct infringement of the author's and the publishers' rights and those responsible may be liable in law accordingly.

All trademarks used herein are the property of their respective owners. The use of any trademark in this text does not vest in the author or publisher any trademark ownership rights in such trademarks, nor does the use of such trademarks imply any affiliation with or endorsement of this book by such owners.

Pearson Education is not responsible for the content of third-party internet sites.

ISBN: 978-1-292-08329-2 (print)  
978-1-292-08415-2 (PDF)  
978-1-292-08413-8 (eText)  
978-1-292-08414-5 (ePub)

### *British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for the print edition is available from the British Library

### *Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record for the print edition is available from the Library of Congress

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
18 17 16 15 14

Series cover design by David Carroll & Co

Print edition typeset in 10/14pt Plantin MT Pro by 71  
Print edition printed and bound in Great Britain by Henry Ling Ltd, at the Dorset Press,  
Dorchester, Dorset

NOTE THAT ANY PAGE CROSS REFERENCES REFER TO THE PRINT  
EDITION

*For Lucy, Noah, Evie and Nate*



# Contents

About the author	ix
Author's acknowledgements	x
Introduction	xi
<b>part 1</b> Foundations	1
1 Switching on	3
2 Memory building	23
3 Memory boosting	45
4 Taking control	69
5 Global learning	87
<b>part 2</b> Applications	109
6 Learning lists	111
7 Words and ideas	133
8 Numbers and names	159
9 Under pressure	185
10 Self-improvement	209
Conclusion	235
Further reading	237
Index	239



# About the author

**Jonathan Hancock** taught himself to have a brilliant memory when he was still at school – to win a bet, and then to break two Guinness World Records. He was one of the first people to achieve the rank of Grandmaster of Memory and became World Memory Champion at the age of 22. He has since shown off his remarkable memory on TV and radio programmes around the world.

A graduate of Oxford University and former BBC radio presenter, Jonathan has published ten books on thinking and learning, acted as a memory consultant for broadcasting and telecoms companies and led training courses in business and education.

Alongside his job as a teacher in a busy city primary school, every year Jonathan works with The Learning Skills Foundation to run the national Junior Memory Championship.

A keen marathon-runner, he lives with his wife and three children in Brighton.

# Author's acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Samantha Jackson, Rachel Hayter and the whole team at Pearson for their enthusiasm and support for this book from the start.

Thanks are also due to my agent, Caroline Shott, and to all the members of The Learning Skills Foundation.

And to my family: endless gratitude for the patience and consideration they've shown me during the writing of this book. They're a constant reminder of the fun, excitement and joy involved in laying down lasting memories, and my life with Lucy, Noah, Evie and Nate has given me so many rich experiences to remember and cherish.

# Introduction

We used to believe that memories were made in our hearts. Then we discovered the brilliant brain, and the last few centuries have been spent trying to understand what's going on between our ears. But memory's on the move again. The more we try to pin it down, the more elusive it becomes. And I don't know about you but a great deal of my memory is now definitely in my back pocket.

Inside my mobile phone I have all the numbers I use regularly, plus access to online directories that let me track down anyone else I might need to call. The internet provides me with more information than I will ever have time to use, accessible wherever I am in the world. My phone itself holds lists of jobs to do, calendars full of important birthdays, daily schedules, email address lists, maps ... The alarm reminds me to wake up in the morning, the voice-recorder allows me to gather information on the move and retrieve it at my leisure, and the camera helps me to record and relive any moment I choose in phenomenal detail.

And yet ... I'm *so* glad I learnt to use my own memory power. It's changed my life, and I want this book to change yours.

There's never been a time when memory was more important. Thanks to the speed the world turns, the sheer amount of information hitting us from every angle, the increased demands on our time and energy, and the high standards we set ourselves for what we can do in a lifetime, memory is now a more valuable

commodity than ever before. There may be more tools to support it, but there's so much more going on to challenge it, and there's no escaping the fact that your memory is still crucial to your success in everything you do. But it's not just about coping, forgetting less, stopping the rot. It's about making very conscious decisions to use memory to be brilliant. Your confidence with memory goes to the very heart of who you are and what you can achieve.

I've had some wonderful adventures with memory. I taught myself to memorise playing cards to break world records, then learnt how to remember *anything* to win memory awards and competitions ... and suddenly discovered a growing community of people fascinated by the latent power of the human brain. I found out about memory techniques that had been around since ancient times and which still worked today. In fact they were perfect for the modern world because they made it possible to remember at speed, under pressure, creatively, efficiently, enjoyably; and rather than simply remembering more, they revealed the importance of remembering *better*. Because these days it's not how much you can remember, but what you choose to do with your memory that really counts.

Anyone can have a better memory. It's an active skill that you learn and practise. Ancient civilisations were much more aware of the best systems and strategies, but there's no reason why you can't start using some powerful techniques immediately and get so much more out of your memory, however old you are and whatever your experiences of learning have been like so far.

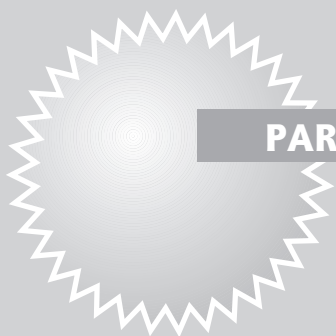
You'll remember more – and do it faster, find it easier, be more accurate. You'll get more out of everything you learn, engaging with it on a whole new level. You'll see the advantages of putting your learning skills to work in areas you never thought of before, and enjoy benefits you didn't even connect with memory: better communication, improved relationships, stronger imagination,

sharper decision making, more confidence all round. You'll feel good about the future, know how to make other people remember you, and redefine your own opinion about what you can achieve – when you put your mind to it.

My pocket memory's good, and I use it every day, but the memory I've built for myself is what makes the real difference to what I achieve and how I feel.

I've written this book to get you started on your own memory adventure. I want you to see just what a difference it makes when you know what memory is really about, and how to use yours, *brilliantly*.

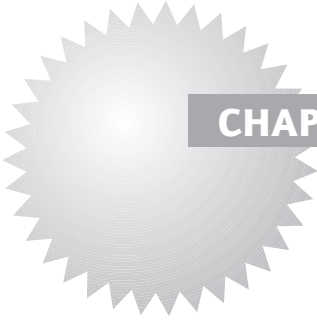




**PART 1**

# Foundations





## CHAPTER 1

# Switching on

The true art of memory is the art  
of attention.

Samuel Johnson



In this chapter you will learn:

- how this book works, and how to *make* it work for you
- why ancient systems are essential in a modern world
- techniques for assessing your current attitudes and abilities
- which aspects of memory will help you most, now and in the future
- the dos and don'ts of developing a brilliant memory

This book is a memory manual, and you need to know that from the start. You've got hold of it, opened it, started reading it ... and now you need to make a conscious decision to *use* it – because brilliant memory is all about choice, action and practice. It's a different way of thinking and doing. There are old habits to break and new behaviours to develop, and you'll only get there if you pay attention and commit to the challenge from the start.

It's an ambitious training programme, but trust the process. You'll be amazed at how quickly you can change the way you use your brain, and how easy it is to start enjoying the benefits of a brilliant memory. Be confident. You've got everything it takes.

### Did you know?

Neurons, the nerve cells in your brain, communicate their electrochemical signals through junctions called synapses, determining the way you think and remember. Patterns of connectivity form thoughts and handle memories, and the strongest memories seem to involve particularly rich connections. Your brain holds around a hundred billion neurons, each with an average of 7000 connections to other cells. Brains simplify some of their structures with age, but an adult still has up to 500 trillion synapses – plenty of scope for a lifetime of complex connecting and brilliant memory making.

## Your unique brain

Your brain is utterly original, one of a kind. Even the visible folds on its surface are different from every other brain on the planet, and your individual experiences have built you a brain unlike any other. There will be aspects of your thinking that operate particularly well, and others that need some work; but *your* memory improvement is the complete focus of this book, so don't worry about comparing yourself with others. You can use their examples and insights, but this training manual will work only if you personalise it and make it about you.

---

### **brilliant** exercise

Picture an elephant. That elephant is now unique. It will probably be similar to the one I'm imagining as I write this, and to the elephants that other readers create; but the exact size, shape, colour, sound, smell and everything else about that particular elephant are yours and yours alone. The way it moves, the look in its eyes and, crucially, the way it makes you *feel*: it's all personal to you and your imagination.

---

You'll be asked to use your imagination throughout this book, and when you do you need to relish the fact that the results will be different from everyone else's. In fact, the memory strategies will work only if you make them your own. Having a brilliant memory is all about creating powerful, personal connections; so, follow my suggestions to get you started, but build up your confidence in what your own powers of imagination can do.

Everything in this book is designed to offer direct help to *your* memory, *now*. Many of the examples and exercises are based on particular occasions, activities or professions, but they all have something to offer – because they all develop thinking tools that benefit everyone. You'll find out how to apply them to your own specific needs, but the most important thing is that you try them all out from the start, training your brain and developing the powerful mental habits that will revolutionise your memory.

Celebrate that your brain is different. Make the most of the way your particular model works. Tap into your strongest emotions, incorporate your interests and experiences and use all the objects, places and people around you as you set up systems for remembering everything. Remember: your imagination is as private as you want it to be. Nobody needs to know what goes on in your head as you switch on your creative brain and let it loose on your learning.

## Learning with others

So this book is about you, but you're not in it alone. The training process is very much about all the other people you come into contact with along the way. Not only are you going to learn how to speak and write in ways that everyone else remembers, and to present yourself with a really positive impact, but you'll also be able to lead by example. The things you learn about memory can change the way all the other people in your life behave, think and remember.

And it's also about some important people from the past. This is a modern book that includes some very ancient wisdom: a unique combination of the old and the new. The memory strategies explored are relevant to all the real challenges you face, but they're all based on old-fashioned traditions. To build a brain capable of coping with today's demanding world you need to know how earlier civilisations mastered the art of memory.

## Memory, then and now

These days, in techno-speak, SIM may stand for Subscriber Identity Module, that tiny card that stores key data on your phone. But Sim was also a very important man in the history of memory, and his story should help you to see why the ancient world has such a role to play in this modern memory manual.

---



### **brilliant** example

#### Sim's story

Like you, Sim was interested in memory and how it could benefit his life. He'd developed memory strategies to help him in his profession and was making quite a success of it, but it took a tragedy to bring about his breakthrough moment ...

Sim had been asked to give a presentation at a big social event, but he got into an argument when the host tried to get out of paying him the full fee. Just as things were getting heated, Sim was called outside: remarkable good fortune, really, because at that moment the roof of the building collapsed, crushing all those inside. The bodies were mangled beyond recognition. As the sole survivor, Sim was asked if he could help work out who was whom.

To everyone's amazement – not least his own – Sim found that he could remember every single person at the banquet simply by thinking about where they'd been sitting. The structure of the building provided the

structure his memory needed, boosted by vivid images of the room mixed in with powerful emotions and a driving need to make his memory work.

Crucially, Sim used this experience to learn how to remember better. He recognised the things that activated his recall, and decided he was going to find ways to keep using his memory this brilliantly.

Sim is short for Simonides, the Ancient Greek poet in this seminal episode in the history of memory. The events described above took place at a feast organised by the rich businessman Scopas, who wanted Simonides to perform from memory but didn't want to pay him properly (although, in the end, he did pay the price ...). Legend has it that Simonides' insights into the architecture of memory and the power of places and pictures set the ancient world alight, revealing how memory could be controlled and put to powerful use.

---

Throughout this book you'll be using lessons from the distant past to improve your success in the most modern scenarios. You'll need to know something of the history and a little of the science, but what you need most of all is 'guided practice': opportunities to feel what it's like to use your memory well *now*.

---

### brilliant exercise

Have a go straight away. Experience how the ancients used to switch on their memories.

You're going to learn the following shopping list, in perfect order, forwards and backwards. Here's your first chance to learn how to remember by *doing* it.

rice sausages wine peas cheese eggs chicken bin-bags  
tinfoil washing-powder

Look at the four corners of the room you're in now. In a moment they're going to be filled with shopping – thanks to the powers of your creative imagination.

Pick one of the corners and keep your eyes fixed on it as you imagine a large pile of rice there, with sausages sticking out. Superimpose this image on the real corner of the real room.

Then turn to the next corner, clockwise from the first, and this time picture a large glass of red wine there, with peas bobbing on the surface.

Turn again, and in corner number three imagine seeing a big piece of Swiss cheese, with a hard-boiled egg squeezed into each one of the holes.

In the last corner, imagine you can see some baby chickens jumping into the black bin-bag that's been taped to the wall. Really see this strange scene happening in front of your eyes.

Finally, in the very centre of the room, imagine that a large square of tinfoil has been laid down and covered in a thick layer of washing powder.

This is what Simonides did: he used the structure of a building to hold on to information for him. See if it's worked for you. Look back around the room and see if you can find the traces of imagery in each corner and in the middle. There should be two items of shopping in each of the five places, giving you the original list – in exactly the original order. And if you start with the product on top of the purchase in the centre, can you turn around the room anticlockwise and read out the ten items in reverse?

---

## Opinions and beliefs

To start using the systems of the past you need to think about what your memory's like today, asking questions like:

- How good is it?
- What do you use it for?
- How do you feel about it?
- What are your current tactics for making it work?
- Which bits need the most support?

As you take your first steps along the path to a trained memory,

it's important to spend some time thinking about where you are now and where you might go.

### brilliant research

Several studies have estimated that around 80 per cent of our 'self-talk', about *everything*, is negative. There's probably a good evolutionary reason for this: our brains are designed for survival, and being cautious and sceptical is usually a safe bet. Learning new skills, thinking differently and stepping out of a tried-and-tested comfort zone will always ring alarm bells, activating safety messages framed as negative thoughts.

When you're switching on to memory training, it's vital that you challenge some of your instinctive reactions. The voice in your head may tell you not to push yourself, to keep doing what you've always done, to feel the fear ... but, *do it anyway*. Test yourself to see what you can really achieve.

### brilliant question

#### ... about your attitudes to memory

Respond to the following statements as honestly as you can. For each one, give yourself a rating somewhere between 0 (completely disagree) and 5 (totally agree). At the end of the book you'll be able to return to these responses and see if your attitudes have changed.

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 'I have a brilliant memory.'                            | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 'Nobody really needs to have a good memory these days.' | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 'My memory is getting worse.'                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 'I'm happy to tell everyone I have a bad memory.'       | <input type="checkbox"/> |