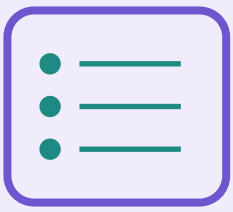
AP PSYCHOLOGY | UNIT 2

TOPIC 2.4

Encoding Memories

Encoding gets information into memory. Attention, meaning, organization, and timing determine how well it lasts.



attention + organization

make information easier to retrieve

BUILD A STRONGER MEMORY TRACE

ATTEND → select information

CONNECT → add meaning

ORGANIZE → chunk + classify

SPACE → practice over time

BY THE END, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO...

1. Explain mnemonic devices and the method of loci.
2. Apply chunking, categories, and hierarchies to organize information.
3. Compare massed and distributed practice and explain serial position.

BIG IDEA

Strong encoding is active: transform information into meaningful, organized cues instead of merely looking at it.

1 Make information memorable

Encoding improves when material is linked to vivid cues and arranged into meaningful structure.

MNEMONIC DEVICES

MNEMONIC

A memory aid that adds structure, imagery, rhythm, or a memorable cue to otherwise difficult information.

CUE-RICH

METHOD OF LOCI

Imagine placing each idea at a familiar location. Mentally walk the route later to retrieve the items.

PLACE -> WALK -> RECALL

ORGANIZE THE LOAD

CHUNKING

Combine separate pieces into fewer meaningful units.

1945 | 2026

CATEGORIES

Group related information by a shared feature or meaning.

fruit | tools | animals

HIERARCHIES

Arrange broad ideas above subtopics and details.

topic -> section -> detail

DEPTH OF ENCODING

STRUCTURAL
appearance

→

PHONEMIC
sound

→

SEMANTIC
meaning

deeper, more meaningful encoding

2 Timing and list position

When practice occurs and where an item appears can both change the chance of later recall.

SPACING EFFECT

MASSED PRACTICE

Cramming: many repetitions in one session. It may feel fluent but is often less durable.

S S S S S

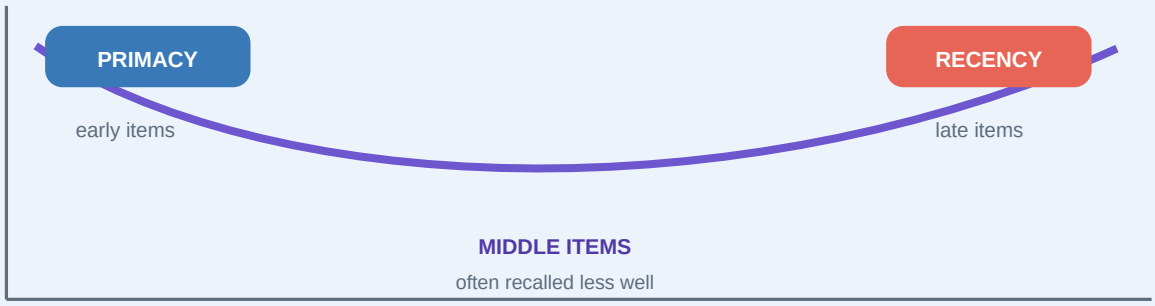
DISTRIBUTED PRACTICE

Spaced study: shorter sessions across time. Spacing supports encoding and consolidation.

1 2 3 4 5

SPACING EFFECT Distributed practice usually produces stronger long-term retention than massed practice.

SERIAL POSITION EFFECT



STUDY RECIPE Space sessions, organize material, add meaningful cues, and practice retrieving it.