



Remember More with Active Recall

How self-quizzing helps you retain information

You finish reading a chapter, look over your highlights, and feel ready for the test. But when a question asks you to explain an idea without your notes, the answer doesn't come as easily.

Recognizing information on a page and remembering it on your own are different tasks. **Active recall** helps you practice the second one.

Often called *retrieval practice*, active recall means bringing information to mind without looking at the answer first. You might answer a practice question, explain a concept aloud, or write down what you remember from a lesson. These simple activities give you practice accessing knowledge when you need it. [The Learning Scientists](#)

Why self-quizzing works

A quiz can do more than measure what you know. It can also help you remember what you've learned.

In a 2006 study, psychologists Henry Roediger and Jeffrey Karpicke asked students to study passages and then either reread the material or practice recalling it. Rereading helped more on a test given just five minutes later. But students who practiced recall remembered more when tested two days or one week later—even though repeated reading made students feel more confident.

The finding illustrates the *testing effect*: retrieving information can improve later retention. It also explains why a study session that feels smooth and easy may not be the best measure of lasting learning. [Roediger & Karpicke, *Psychological Science*](#)

Make active recall part of your routine

Start with a small section of material you've already studied:

- 1 **Close your notes.** Put the information out of sight so you have a chance to retrieve it.

- 2 **Ask yourself a question.** Try “What were the main ideas?” or “How would I explain this process?”
- 3 **Produce an answer.** Write it down, say it aloud, or draw a diagram from memory.
- 4 **Check your work.** Compare your answer with a reliable source, such as your textbook or class notes. Correct errors and fill in missing details.
- 5 **Return to it later.** Quiz yourself again in a future study session.

Checking your answer matters. Feedback helps correct mistakes and gives you a clearer picture of what needs more attention. Spreading practice across sessions also gives you opportunities to retrieve material after some time has passed. [RetrievalPractice.org](https://retrievalpractice.org)

Go beyond memorizing definitions

Choose questions that match what you need to learn. For example:

- **History:** “What were two causes of this event, and how did they contribute?”
- **Biology:** “Can I draw and label this process from memory?”
- **Literature:** “How does this scene support the novel’s theme?”
- **Math:** “Can I solve a similar problem without following a worked example?”

Flashcards can help, too. Pause and give your answer before flipping the card. Include questions that ask you to explain relationships or give examples, alongside cards for facts and vocabulary. You can also use textbook questions or create questions with a study partner. [The Learning Scientists’ study guide](#)

Use mistakes to guide your next step

If you get stuck, make a reasonable attempt, then review the explanation. Write a corrected answer in your own words and revisit the question later. If you still don’t understand the idea, ask your teacher or a study partner for help before continuing.

Keep these quizzes low pressure. A missed answer gives you something specific to work on; an incomplete explanation shows you where to look more closely. Feedback makes that information useful for planning your next study session. [RetrievalPractice.org’s guide to feedback](https://retrievalpractice.org/guide-to-feedback)

For your next study session, choose one topic and write three questions about it. Close your notes, answer from memory, and check your responses. Bring those questions back the next time you study—and see what you can explain on your own.