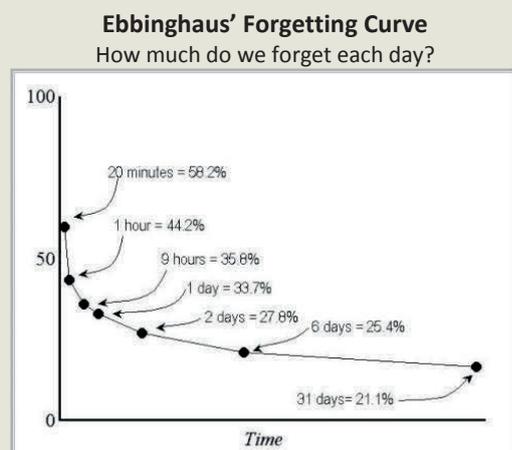


### Helping students retain information over time – the importance of recaps

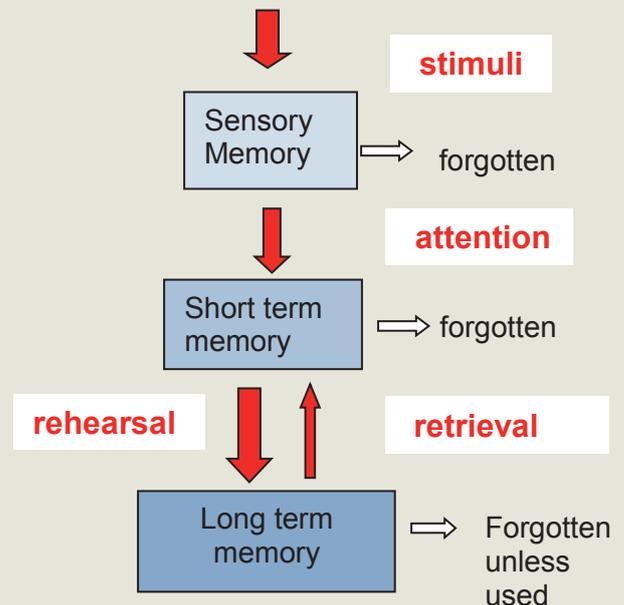
Ebbinghaus in the 1880s, in his experiments on memory and retention of information, concluded that after 24 hours we have forgotten up to two-thirds of what was learned.



Psychologists consider that failure to remember things may be due to initial lack of attention, or lack of **rehearsal** so that information is not successfully transferred between the short term memory, and the long term memory where it is stored

Assuming the student is attentive, stimuli, for example a piece of information, passes in a moment from the 'sensory' memory to the short term memory. Curzon (2003) suggests that the information may only stay in the short term memory for 15-20 seconds before it is forgotten. A main reason for forgetting is lack of rehearsal. Rehearsal will allow the information

to pass to the long-term memory where it may remain permanently, but is subject to decay unless we use it.



Atkinson–Shiffrin Memory Model (1968) - adapted

As tutors we can aid students with passing information into and from the long term memory if we consider a number of aspects related to our teaching:

- Planning and sequencing content:  
*'The more other facts one fact is associated with in the mind, the better possession of it our memory retains. Each of its associates becomes a hook on which it hangs, a means to fish it up when sunk beneath the surface'.*  
(James 1890)
- Using 'building block' approaches – breaking the learning into manageable chunks that build logically.
- Practice through *active* learning (see newsletter April 2014)
- Regular revision/recap.

### Embedding previous learning

The trick of moving learning from short to long term memory is finding multiple ways of revising that are interesting and engaging.

One useful thing to consider is how we can return to a previous context while at the same time teaching something new. This gives a further chance for students to embed knowledge, skill and attitudes.

So, for example, a language teacher may have been teaching comparisons and superlatives (taller, tallest) in the context of buying things. This time she decides to get the group to furnish a room, paint the walls and choose fabric in the context of expressing preferences and making suggestions eg *'Would this fabric be best?'*. Old and new learning are thus combined.

This combination of old and new can be achieved in most areas of the curriculum – it just needs some creative thought.

### Recaps and warmers

Most, if not all of us, will tend to do a recap of last session at the beginning of the next session. This can also act as a 'warmer' to get students talking to each other.

### Mid-term workshops.

A nice way of getting students to put all their learning together is to set up a workshop session where the topic or activity allows them to rescue and use the things they have learned so far.

### The meaning of 'retention'

In a time of target setting, 'retention' seems to have taken on a different meaning – student retention is a statistic which has funding implications.

As educationalists, we need to support retention in the other, older sense - helping students retain information etc in the session, primarily via the use of appropriate methods, and then retain

### What methods work well for recapping?

We need something light, not too risky and not heavily time-consuming:

**Short quizzes** fit the bill well, for example. Get students to self mark, or mark each others.

Technology can help:

**'Hot Potatoes'** software is on all City Lit computers and can be used to create simple quizzes online. You can use these on the Interactive Whiteboard or Moodle.

City Lit now has **'voting' systems** that allows students use a handset to register their answer and the results are immediately displayed (anonymously) on the Interactive Whiteboard.

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information over time via embedding and recapping. If we are not doing that then the question arises 'what are we doing?'

A basic philosophy of adult education is that over time we help our students become independent and autonomous learners – that can only happen if we are using strategies to help them remember the learning they have already done.



All citations from  
Curzon LB (2003  
6th ed) *Teaching in Further Education*.  
London: Bloomsbury

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*We recognise we are not a 'one size fits all' organisation. If you would like to contribute contact Wendy Moss, Teaching and Learning, Wendy.Moss@citylit.ac.uk*