

The importance of memory in learning a second language cannot be underestimated. Just think of how many words a student needs, for both recognition and production, in order to achieve even an intermediate level of English: current estimates put this figure at around 3,000. All of these words, at some time, have to be stored in the student's long term memory, and have to be available for immediate retrieval. But it's not just words that the student needs to commit to memory. Researchers are now convinced that fluency in speech and writing owes in large part to the learner's capacity to store, not just individual words, but lexical 'chunks'. Chunks are groups of words that tend to occur together, either because they are common collocations, like *fair hair*, *fair enough*, *fair and square*, or because they are fixed formulaic utterances, like greetings (*nice to meet you*) and other speech acts (*would you like a cup of tea?*). These chunks are encountered, stored and retrieved as individual units. Some researchers estimate that proficient speakers have a memorised 'bank' of literally tens of thousands of these items.

Dialogues are an ideal way of providing learners with a rich diet of words and chunks in context, and in a format that allows easy and repeated practice. It follows, then, that there are good grounds for sometimes asking students to memorise them.

There are many factors which will influence how readily language items will be retained by students. Repetition is perhaps the most fundamental. The more often the student encounters and repeats a language item, the greater the chance of it being remembered. But this does not mean simply memorising and parroting a dialogue meaninglessly. Memory is aided if the learner is challenged to retrieve the item in new and unusual ways. Being challenged to remember the lines of a dialogue without seeing it (perhaps in a subsequent lesson) is one way of doing this. Turning the activity into a game or competition adds an extra incentive. Redeploying memorised chunks in new contexts and to express personal meanings also contributes to the process of constant recycling and review.

Memory of a word or phrase is also enhanced if it has strong associations. These associations may be emotional. Dialogic utterances tend to be tied very closely to feelings, and the more we can encourage learners to engage

Dialogue Activities

with the feelings behind the language, as actors learning lines do, the more readily the memorising strategies of the learners will come into play.

Who said what? (4.1), Reduced dialogues (4.2) and Story to dialogue (4.3) explore ways of challenging learners to recall and reconstruct dialogues that have already occurred.

In Adjacency pair turnover cards (4.4), Remembering the questions (4.5) and Dialogue halves (4.6) the emphasis is on using memorised utterances to create new dialogues.

Line by line (4.7) and Prompts (4.8) move into work with longer dialogues, and look at some techniques used by actors to remember the lines of their scripts.

4.1 Who said what?

Outline	Students mingle around using sentences which practise a particular area of language. They then try to remember the sentences of the others in the class
Focus	Providing controlled language practice in a challenging and motivating way
Level	Elementary plus
Time	20 minutes plus, depending on the number of students
Materials and preparation	Write out some natural sample sentences which include the grammatical or lexical area that you wish to practise and cut them up into individual slips. You need enough for one for each student in the class. The examples below, using the past simple, are for an elementary group. Other areas that lend themselves to this activity include <i>I'm going to + verb</i> , <i>I used to + verb</i> , <i>I have to + verb</i> etc.

I went to a restaurant	I went to a nightclub	I did some ironing
I played football	I was on the phone	I cooked dinner
I went to the cinema	I studied English	I washed my car
I read a book	I listened to some music	I went on the internet
I stayed at home	I cleaned my house	I wrote some emails
I watched TV	I bought a new car	I went for a walk
I went shopping	I went for a drink	I went to bed early

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