

Rich English – Season 1 Episode 3

How to remember English vocabulary

Do you struggle to remember new words is it hard for you to recall a new phrase you think you learned just yesterday? In today's show I'm going to explain to you how you can drastically improve your recall system and implant new vocabulary in your memory, long term. Welcome back to Rich English episode 3.

So what do you do when you're trying to learn new vocabulary? Well there are many good ways to help you remember your new words and phrases and traditionally people have written them down folded over the paper, written their other language on the other side. If you're like my dad, you might cut up those pieces of paper and use them like mini flash cards. People these days are practising with an application, something like Duolingo. Another way is, you could get people to test you.

Some methods are better than others and it's certainly great to have a mix of these ideas to keep your interest up but which one is really the best? Well, I'm going to tell you that the act of simply trying to remember is in itself certainly one of the best ways. If you focus on recall, on the retrieval and the self testing and you combine this with something called spaced repetition, then you're going to make quick and long lasting improvements to the way that you can remember vocabulary. So, self-testing can come in the form of online mobile apps, flash cards, using online tests, but one of the simplest ways is that when you've come across some new words (to come across means to discover or to find) when you've heard some new words and you've maybe noted them down, what are you gonna do next? Well, what I suggest with the people who I work with is - I say to them, okay, at the end of our lesson what you need to do is to just spend a couple of minutes, it doesn't have to be very long, and just try and remember any of the new vocabulary - or sometimes maybe corrections of mistakes, but let's stick to vocabulary - It's the new vocabulary for today's podcast try to remember without looking at what you might have written down, so, as soon as you've finished your lesson, your conversation or watching the film or listening to another podcast or whatever it may be, you've written down a few words - just try and remember them without looking and just spend maybe a minute or two trying to remember as many of them as you can because this act itself of trying to remember is what's going to aid your recall in future it will bring those words quicker back to your mind.

There is, of course, science behind this. This kind of deep self-testing or really trying hard to remember, forms stronger connections in with your brain synapses which makes it easier to retrieve again in the future and, of course, like when you go to the gym, you practise lifting weights for example and you practise recalling the new vocabulary then, of course, it's gonna strengthen that muscle and it will become quicker and more like second nature to you improving your fluency. So, of course, there're many different ways that you can input the information, if you're wanting to remember new vocabulary.

There are several ways I recommend to people the best of those is to try and visualize the word and it works quite well with nouns. It's more difficult, sometimes I would say maybe impossible, with adjectives and adverbs but certainly when you're trying to remember objects or words for new things then definitely you can visualize these things, and, in my recent Monday Minute (which is a... I don't know if any of you out there actually are on Facebook, I'm sure there's one or two of you are if you find or search for Monday Minute English or search for Richard Hill English and you can find a group that I upload a video to every Monday which is usually between a minute and three

minutes long with a quick tip something to help you improve your English and last week) I was talking about hooks and hooks in terms of memory for vocabulary.

A hook is something in your mind which you are it's a piece of information you already know and on that you can hook a new piece of information and because the old piece of information the hook is already in your brain and you retrieve it very quickly, it's something that comes to mind instantly. Then by connecting it to this new piece of vocabulary you can learn the new piece of vocabulary much quicker.

I often give people the example of when I was learning the months of the year in Czech and some of them are a bit strange and completely different from English in fact most of them are not all of them but there are ways that that you can make the learning of those words easier and you can use as your hooks either a word that you know in your own language or it might be a new word in your target language in this case English. If I give you the example of when I was learning these months in Czech, I used a combination of Czech words that I already knew, and English words or phrases or something that I could use as a hook. The first month is January obviously and in Czech January is *Leden* and the first thing that came to mind was an old Cream song (Cream from the band) Eric Clapton was the guitarist in the band in the 1960s and there's a lyric in the song - I thought the leaden in winter would bring you down forever... The leaden winter – winter – January. That made that one really easy to understand. As well, I already knew the word for ice in Czech is *led* so that was a really simple one to try and remember. So you can go through - May is *Květen*, is a flower, so, flowers in May - May in bloom, that's another easy one to remember. But, then *Prosinec* - I got to *Prosinec*. This is the name, the Czech name for the, for December. That was a bit hard. I couldn't think, *Prosinec*, it doesn't sound like any English word I could think of off the top of my head so I spent a few moments... I said ah! Robert Prosinecki, he was a footballer, Croatian footballer, back in the 1990s I think and I thought okay, I can I can imagine Robert Prosinecki dressed up as Father Christmas. That makes me think of December, so, there we go – December - *Prosinec* – Prosinetsky - Father Christmas – December – *Prosinec*. There we go, that's how it works.

Obviously you have to do it the other way around to learn the English words. With the months as an example, you can you can take... some of them are easier than others to remember... but, for example. December, December is like *deset* (Czech word for 10). If you know anything about your history then December was originally the 10th month of the year. That's why *deset* and December. October, meaning eight because it was the eighth month of the year. Now okay, so we have to add two onto each of those so because October is now the tenth month in December is now the twelfth month but you'll find that even though that's not exactly correct any more then, then just that idea of adding on the two on you'll remember that and that'll happen.

I use these kind of techniques when I am trying to remember the control descriptions for my orienteering events and I remember the numbers by visualizing the numbers, usually with some kind of hook that I already know. If ever I have a number 33 then 33 is Julio Arca, who's a footballer who played for Sunderland in the 1990s and early 2000s. You get the idea, a lot of my memory techniques revolve around football. Of course, for you that might be something completely different. Whatever it is that's in your mind that you know very well, you can try and make a connection and use this, these words or these, all these visual images as hooks. So yeah! That's the the best way.

I also, in a previous video (and I recommend to my English students) - *Sketchnotes*, which is a way of making your note-taking much more visually interesting and therefore more memorable... because you will find that (if rather than just writing down your English word on one side and the word in your own language on the other side, and all in the same typeface the same size with the same colour pen in your usual handwriting) it's very difficult to remember the word. And, it's

certainly difficult to remember where that word is on the page and even on which page. With *Sketchnotes* what you'll find is, that you'll be able to not only remember the word, but you'll remember exactly where it is on a particular piece of paper and if you have one piece of paper for example for each of your lessons (if you have a regular English lesson and you take *Sketchnotes*) then you'll build up this, almost subconscious, memory of where these particular pieces of vocabulary are situated (located)

I've been doing this technique with a couple of my English students over the last few years and really we have pages, and I mean tens of pages, maybe something up to 100 pages over several years of A3 paper which we've drawn on over the course of say a couple of weeks lessons. And, even now I can remember exactly where if my student needs to refresh metals for example I know which sheet to go back to how far back it is roughly and whereabouts on the page it is... (in the top right corner, not that that helps you)... but you get the idea. So, how do you do *Sketchnotes*? Well, first of all throw out all of the typical rules for note taking and be as creative as you possibly can. Use different colours, certainly use different styles of writing. Different typefaces, you can use some things in capitals, some in lowercase, although I must add a little caveat which if any of you out there listening have actually been to Britain, you'll notice that the road signs are all in lower case, with the exception of obviously, the capital letter at the start of the place name as it should be.

The reason for this, is because it was discovered that when you're driving along at speed, particularly on a motorway, you only have a second or two to look at a sign as you drive past it. And, it's much easier to identify the word if it's written in lowercase because it has its own unique shape, whereas if you write everything in uppercase or capital letters everything looks like a box. Okay, there might be a different length to the box... if I take the example of Cambridge and York, one is a short box and the other is a long box but... if I write those two words in lower case then they have a specific shape and if I've got for example Kettering and Cambridge which when I'm driving quickly, I might not notice exactly which one is in which position, I can tell from the shape because the shape is different. So, that's another good way to think about something to think about when you're making your *Sketchnotes* - use different colour, use different sizes, draw pictures with it. Again, anything that's quite visually stimulating, particularly if it's a noun. If it's an object, you can draw a little picture. Don't worry about being a good artist, it doesn't matter, it's simply something for you to aid your memory, to aid your recall, to make it faster to remember.

So another thing similar to *Sketchnotes* is *mind mapping* and *mind mapping* is something that I have been advocating for many many years since I read a fantastic book by Tony Buzan. Tony Buzan is an excellent guy to read if you want to discover more about how to use your memory and not just for language learning but for many different things. For remembering people's names and faces for example, but Tony Buzan invented *mind mapping* and *mind mapping* at its best, or, in its true form is a very organic looking picture with a main image in the centre along with a word which is your main theme. and then coming out from each side you may have several kind of tentacle looking lines which start off quite thick and they have a main theme. Now, I often use this *mind mapping* idea for if I want to try and remember the content of a book. I'll sometimes mind map an entire book and each of the first thick lines that come out of the main image in the middle is a chapter heading and then off that you have the smaller lines with smaller writing because on each of the lines you're going to write a main theme. Again, I suggest in lower case, each line section will have a different colour because then you can remember chapter one for example is red and it's about the present perfect tense for example, and then off that line, again, you have thinner red lines with slightly smaller writing with the main themes about it. So, you might have, for example, there are five uses or five situations where you can use the present perfect. Now, I'm giving you the example of using this for grammar and *mind mapping* is probably slightly more suited to that, but certainly there's no reason why you can't use it for vocabulary as well. It could be a particular theme, you know, it could be gardening for example, and then the first line comes off as tools and the second line is plants and the third one is some other kind of material or whatever it might be and then, of

course, you can be drawing little pictures along with your words. You can be writing your words both in your own language as well as in English.

So, I've given you quite a lot to think about there, to remember, vocabulary, and I'm sure over the coming weeks when I do more of these solo shows, I'll go a little bit more in depth into each of these things. Mnemonics is another thing I haven't really talked about there and I'll get into that one again in a few weeks time.

So before we finish I want to give you a specific business English term which can help you and I've already talked about hooks in terms of memory techniques... but the word *hook* is also used in marketing terms and a hook, sometimes often referred to as a *strap line* as well, but a hook is that kind of a short line of text, short sentence or phrase under your brand name or your product name which is going to grab the attention of a potential customer or client. I'll give you a couple of examples. Many years ago, I think back in about 2003, 2005 something like that, Apple released the iPod and they released it with the hook *1 000 songs in your pocket*. It grabs the attention of the listener or viewer it tells you exactly what this thing does, is or has the potential to be.

Another example would be Tim Ferris's book *The 4-hour work week*. Now that's the title of his book, but what a great hook - four hour work week! Who wouldn't want to work only four hours a week? Who wouldn't want a thousand songs in their pocket at the time when we used to carry around a CD player CD Walkman and maybe four or five CDs in your bag? You can tell how old I am right? So, that's that's the hook in business terms, in marketing terms. I'll leave you with that one for today.

So, just to summarize - today's show has been about how you can better remember new vocabulary and phrases and I've given you a few ideas for how you can go about doing that, *Sketchnotes mind mapping*, visualization and using hooks.

So, if you want to find out any more information about any of these things you'll find it on my blog www.richardhill.cz

You can search the blog for any of those terms of course. I want to get this podcast out to a wider audience and I'm absolutely delighted that you are listening to it, thank you very much. Please will you give me a little review? Will you give me a little rating? You can do that both on my website where I'm hosting the podcast on my own website better still if you're listening on Apple podcasts or Google podcasts or Stitcher or Acast, rate it, leave me a review and of course that's, that's the way you can get in touch with me as well and let me know who you'd like to hear me interview, What you'd like to hear me talk about. Of course, I've got plenty of ideas of my own but it's great if you guys can give me some feedback. So, that's all for now and I shall be back next week with another interview session and the week after with another solo show so all the best for today and I look forward to speaking to you again next week. Bye-bye for now.