Picturing

There is no comprehension without picturing – it’s that simple. Picturing refers to a process in your brain that must occur for comprehension to take place. It’s your brain connecting language, either written or verbal, to an image or model already stored in it. If I say to you, “The black dog chased the white cat up the tree,” you get a picture in your mind. If you don’t, you have absolutely no comprehension of what I just said. Now try this, “The baby cried when the doctor gave him a shot.” Did you get a different picture? Try another one: “The sun was a bright ball of orange as it dipped below the horizon.” There is no comprehension without picturing. This is a critical educational fact!

To make the pictures and comprehend meaning, you need a clear and vivid imagination. Imagination is the ability to form pictures and ideas in your mind without directly experiencing them.
Give it a try:

Picture a place you know well, like your bedroom. Can you see what’s sitting on your desk or on your shelves? Where do you keep your books and important papers? Can you picture yourself sitting on the bed talking on the phone? Your imagination allows you to see this place whenever you want. You don’t need to actually be there.

Now that you’re warmed up, imagine something you have never seen before, like a zebra with orange and green stripes or a dog flying like a bird around your room while you’re lying in bed talking on the phone. Can you picture these images?

More Brain, More Pictures, More Memory

Prime your mind to picture by engaging both sides of your brain. You already learned about the hippocampus and its role in getting information into long-term memory, which is stored in your neocortex. The important thing to know about the neocortex is that it has two parts, or hemispheres, and each controls different brain functions. Although there is crossover, the left hemisphere is primarily logical, sequential, linear and rational. Everything from calculating a tip at a restaurant, to studying for a history exam runs on left-brain juice. In fact, most of our society and school systems favor left-brain activity. Language, writing, reading, assimilating details, and understanding symbolism are all left-brain stuff.
The right hemisphere is another world. It is unordered, intuitive, holistic and random. It is also geared towards non-verbal elements like feeling, emotions, spatial awareness, shapes, patterns, music and art.

*Just a few examples of left- and right-brain activities:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEFT BRAIN</th>
<th>RIGHT BRAIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>calculating numbers</td>
<td>dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>following directions</td>
<td>painting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>learning a computer program</td>
<td>daydreaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giving a speech</td>
<td>music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>preparing for school</td>
<td>feeling joy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upgrading your memory means expanding how you use both sides of your brain. Balancing your left and right hemisphere activity will help you learn faster and become a more intuitive and creative memorizer. It also primes your mind to make pictures to comprehend meaning.

You now know the most important piece of the memory puzzle: picturing. But pictures alone don’t make memories. Your brain assigns meaning to pictures with the power of associating.
Associating

Since memory is a visual skill, we are always turning ideas and information into pictures to encode the content into our memory. In other words, you associate or connect the image with whatever you want to remember.

You associate information with things you can picture or sense like images, locations, numbers, sights, sounds or smells.

For example, we all experience association when a familiar smell creates a picture in our minds. The smell of popcorn might remind you of a particular film you saw at the movie theatre.

Whether you’re aware of it or not, your brain is wired to make associations. You can upgrade your memory by making these connections as clear and strong as possible. The memory triggers and memory tools in the next two chapters will help you do just that!
The Power of Association: Shapes and a Story

How do you go from thinking you’ll never be able to memorize something to being the very best memorizer out of all your peers? One way is to use the power of association to create clear pictures in your mind about what you want to remember, and put the pictures together into a story.

That’s what one young student did, with the help of her dad, to master a geography test. The test required the fourth grader to identify each of the 50 states on a U.S. map. She was worried, however, that she couldn’t remember all the names by just looking at a blank shape. Her dad once used the power of association to memorize 3,000 vocabulary words and ace a college placement exam. So together they created a story about the shapes of each state to help her remember the names. Soon, states became shapes – like a tetherball pole – which reminded her of one of her favorite movie characters who lived in a state with that shape. She moved from state to state, seeing a shape, remembering the association, and writing in the state’s name.

When she took the test, she got every state right, except she forgot to fill in Alaska and Hawaii because she didn’t see them. Her teacher let her retake the entire test and she got 100% – again. She was the first student in her class to get all the states right on the test.