

Most effective vocabulary learning technique revealed

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UCL and language learning app Memrise have announced the winner of the first 'Memprize', a competition to find the world's most efficient and effective vocabulary learning technique.



A team from Radboud University in the Netherlands won the prize after over a year of in-depth real-life empirical experiments involving more than 10,000 Memrise users as volunteers.

Memprize was launched in 2014 to objectively compare the effectiveness of different ways of learning, and was led by Dr Rosalind Potts (UCL Psychology and Language Sciences). The Memprize challenged brain scientists to create the best way of learning 80 foreign vocabulary items in an hour, with a test one week later.

The winning learning method, which more than doubled memory performance compared to the standard technique of repeated study, was based on a combination of different methods. Volunteers were trained to use the concept of memory palaces to visualise words in certain rooms for a later practice session which adapted to their performance. Participants also rated this method as the most enjoyable way to learn.

Professor David Shanks, Head of Psychology and Language Sciences at UCL said, "The competition provided a unique opportunity to do something never before achieved in the history of psychology. The focus has always been on single isolated factors – for example, the impact of imagery or sleep on memory and learning – but never on the bigger picture of how to combine factors in an optimal way. Now that we have a benchmark, learning sciences can only improve from here."

Ed Cooke, co-founder of Memrise said, "Bizarrely, there's no real scientific consensus on the best overall method to learn, in particular to learn a language. And this is a fundamental question that we should be finding the answer to. Through the Memprize competition, we wanted to stimulate researchers around the world to combine the available knowledge into a practical solution – and this is exactly what we have done!"

The Memprize winners are a research team who carried out their experiment at the Donders Institute for Brain and Cognition and the Behavioural Science Institute of Radboud University.

Gesa van den Broek, PhD Candidate and Project Lead at Radboud University said, "We're delighted to have won the first Memprize. This was a fascinating project for our team, which allowed us to combine our different research backgrounds. Our hope is that these results will raise awareness around key findings from the learning sciences. Learners who understand some basic workings of the mind, for example, that you can and should practice memory retrieval, can make smarter study choices. It will be great to see the ideas collected in this project inspire the development of effective learning apps."

The winning team included Gesa van den Broek, Anke Marit Albers, Ruud Berkers, Paul Konstantin Gerke, Marlieke van Kesteren, Boris Konrad and Nils Müller.

Links

- [Memprize](#)
- [Professor David Shanks' academic profile](#)
- [Dr Rosalind Potts' academic profile](#)
- [UCL Psychology and Language Sciences](#)
- [UCL Brain Sciences](#)

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