# How to Overcome Absent-Mindedness and “Remember to Remember”

The term “memory” can actually refer to many different traits. Someone who has a great memory might be someone who can memorize a huge list of information, or who can throw out quotes and facts with ease.

But if that same person forgets the milk, and forgets people’s names, then you might think of them as having bad memories still!

This is the different between “memory” and “absent mindedness.” And in fact, this distinction is a lot more complex and interesting that just that.

**Paying Attention**

Usually our memories are associated with a variety of other events, concepts, textures, colours, smells and emotions which all help us to retrieve the information. If we do not engage properly with the stimulus however because we are distracted then we won’t lay down as many connections and will find it more difficult to retrieve.

This is the difference between ‘deep encoding’ and ‘shallow encoding’, so if you experience a lot of forgetfulness it may help to try playing around with the information you want to recall in your head and thinking about how it makes you feel and how it relates to other concepts. Many find that mind-maps can be a great visual way to do this.

To retrieve lost memories try recalling the situation you learned them in and any other events or stimulus present at the time. Short term memory however is forgotten more often and refers to the temporary memories we hold in our brain while doing maths etc. Here we are only capable of retaining 5-9 ‘units’ or ‘digits’ of information. This makes it almost impossible to remember a phone number just told to you for example as the new digits will push out the old ones. To get around this problem use ‘chunking’ to group the numbers into single units of information; for example 77 becomes ‘double seven’ or ‘354’ becomes ‘three hundred and fifty four’.

**Remembering to Remember**

Another trick is to try and become more “mindful” and more aware of your situation. A little experiment you can try right now is to try and count the number of times you stand up and sit down in a day. Most people won’t remember to do this even *once*.

This is how distracted and “in our heads” we are most of the time, and it’s why so many of us struggle to remember things. So try meditating and practicing mindfulness and you should see yourself become more attentive and less likely to forget as a result.