**The Forgetting Curve**

**A video created by McGill’s Teaching and Learning Services**

[What is the forgetting curve?]

Over 100 years ago, in 1885, scientist Hermann Ebbinghaus first introduced the concept of the forgetting curve as part of his research into the processes of learning and forgetting.

What the curve demonstrates is that you forget information very quickly when you first learn it, but the information loss tapers off over time.

This trend has since been validated by modern neuroscience in several different studies

Some of these recent studies have also shown that if you interrupt the forgetting shortly after learning the information, for example by reviewing it the next day, you will forget it more slowly than before. Each subsequent review causes you to forget even *more* slowly.

[What’s the science behind this?]

Any learning strategy that causes you to recall information from your memory strengthens the neural pathways in your brain that embed this information into your long-term memory.

[How can you use the forgetting curve to support your learning?]

What strategies can you use to interrupt your forgetting, and strengthen those neural pathways?

Repeated, intentional, spaced review of the material is key to disrupting the forgetting curve to your advantage. Ideally, interrupt your forgetting first within 24 hours after learning the material, then again a few days later. You might use self-testing, flashcards, practice quizzes, or other learning strategies to retrieve information from your memory. The more often you do this, the better you will retain the information.

When reviewing material, be aware not only of what you know, but of what you don’t know. Use any incorrect answers on quizzes or exams to identify gaps in your knowledge, and then spend more time studying those topics.

Regular use of a combination of different learning tools to both interrupt forgetting and identify knowledge gaps is a great way to improve your knowledge retention, and ultimately improve your overall course performance.

**References**

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