

## CHAPTER ONE

# MEMORY 101

*You Can Always Remember  
If You N.E.V.E.R. F.O.R.G.E.T.*

<b>Ava</b>	<b>Grace</b>	<b>Alice</b>	<b>David</b>	<b>Jack</b>	<b>John</b>	<b>Gail</b>	<b>You</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>						

“Welcome to Memory 101!” I just finish preparing for my new students as they begin to arrive at 7:00 p.m. As is my habit with all students, I greet each at the door by name.

“Hello, John, I’m Marilee Sprenger. It’s so nice to meet you.”

John is a bit taken aback, but politely responds with, “Thanks, Marilee. It’s nice to meet you, too.”

I continue my personal greetings. The last person to enter, however, doesn’t match any of the pictures I received with their registration. This woman has very dark hair, and I can’t place her.

“Welcome to the Memory 101 class,” I say. “You don’t look like any of the pictures that were sent to me.” With only seven people in the class, I realize that this should be Mrs. Kilpatrick, but she certainly doesn’t look like the picture I have.

“I’m Gail Kilpatrick. I sent you an old photo of myself. I’ve changed my hair-style and the color. I’m sorry if I confused you.”

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I carefully look at the face, smile, and shake Gail's hand. "It's very nice to have you here," I say sincerely as I turn to the rest of the class, "You can write this down: Connect a face to a name with features that stay the same. Don't try to remember who people are just by their hair. It can change easily. Bank robbers change their appearance in this way and often get away with their crimes."

I write this on the board. I turn back to face the group and the questions begin. "I signed up for this class because I heard it was a good one. I'm feeling a little self-conscious because it's so small. Are there others who are concerned about their memories? Or are we the only ones?" asks Jack.

"Yes. I want to know the answer to that, too. Plus, no offense to anyone, but I think I'm the youngest person here. Do young people take this class? Am I the youngest?" Gail wants to know.

"I'm only forty-two," quips Alice.

David jumps in with, "I'm forty-five. I don't think I'm that much older than Gail."

"So, am I the oldest person here?" Grace asks.

"Hang on, everyone. *I'm* the oldest person here," I interject. "Let me tell you about the people who sign up for this class. My youngest participant was twenty-six and in medical school. The oldest was eighty-two. I have had all ages in between since I started this program. The school district asked me to offer this class here at the school because the feeling was that some of you had memory concerns for your students as well as yourselves. Some of you have specific memory problems, while others just feel like you're 'slipping' in general. This is a class for everyone because most individuals know very little about how their memories work. My hope is to give you confidence, give you strategies, and give you the power to take control of your own memory as well as help your students. I've had many parents try to sign up their children for this class, but I feel it's made for adults and I'm not comfortable mixing the age groups. I thought about creating a Memory 101 for students, but I think if I can share this with the teachers, they can fill the needs of the students."

"Are you saying that my memory may work differently than Grace's?" asks Alice.

"That is exactly what I'm saying. You each have unique memories and your own way of storing them," I reply.

"Or not storing them," adds David.

The entire group laughs, and the stress levels lower in the process.

"Why don't we start with some examples of the problems you are having? I know that when I first started being concerned about my memory, I missed a few appointments."

The entire group nods with understanding and sympathetic smiles. "But you don't do that anymore?" queries David.

"That's right," I respond.

"You write everything down," Grace adds in a knowing way.

"I do have all my appointments in my Palm Pilot, but I don't always have to look."

The group seems impressed, and I urge them to start sharing. Alice is the first to tell her story:

"Well, after being at home for many years, I feel like I've forgotten how to function in the real world. I was always reminding my own kids about appointments, lessons, homework, and chores. If I forgot something, so did they—or so it seemed.

"Now, as a librarian, I have to remember who's holding what for whom. I have to remember when shipments are expected. I have to remember which teachers are bringing their students in which period, and the students expect me to know all their names. When someone asks for a book, I walk around the desk to help them, and by then I've forgotten what they asked."

There are knowing nods and a few comments like, "Been there, done that."

"Thanks, Alice. We all appreciate your sharing. Who would like to go next?"

Jack volunteers. "Okay. Here goes. I get up for the early-bird P.E. class, and I have to leave the house by 6:00 a.m. I'm finding myself forgetting to set my alarm. I'm spending precious time hunting for my car keys or my grade book. I get to school, and I'll forget some kid's name. I see these kids every day. This is scary!

"I never used to have these problems. I remembered everything!"

Everyone nods except David. I look at his apprehension and ask him to go next. He does.

"Well, I know you all have your concerns. I'm sure some of your situations may be embarrassing, but I have trouble keeping my in-school appointments straight. I teach private piano lessons after school hours, and I've missed two of those lessons in the last few months.

"We are getting ready for the school musical, and the principal caught me in the hall and asked which pieces I had selected. I stood there like an idiot. Great way to instill confidence with your administrator, huh? I walked back into my office where I had orchestrated the entire performance and I suddenly remembered. I was so relieved. But I have to make sure I don't do that again. I was certain that something was wrong with me."

As David finishes, the others grow quiet. I say, "I know many of you think you have the beginning stages of Alzheimer's or dementia. Those would

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be distressing, and I am not a clinician qualified to rule out those possibilities. I can tell you from my years of sharing memory information with others that none of my participants, to my knowledge, ever had one of those problems. They were all very much like you, with very similar stories. They left this class knowing they had to put some effort into their memories, but they knew that their memories were normal. Who would like to go next?"

Grace sits up straight, clears her throat, and begins. "I guess my problems are more like Jack's. Beyond that, I'm very concerned about my students. They forget from one day to the next. I know that my students are very young, but I can see that 'aha' moment on their faces one day, and the next they don't have a clue what I'm talking about. Does anyone else see this in their classroom?" Everyone nods.

"I feel like I'm always repeating myself, and I probably am! Not because I don't remember saying things, but rather because my students just don't get it! And yes, I'm worried about my memory, too. My students have to think that nothing gets by me. And lately, things *are* getting by me. I forgot my sister's birthday last week," Grace adds with a sigh.

"Oh, yeah, I've done that, too," quips Jack. "My whole family is probably mad at me for the important dates I forget!"

Ava is next. "I've been teaching for thirty years. At the same school. In the same grade. Is it any wonder I feel as if I'm repeating myself?" Everyone laughs.

She continues. "I have to admit, Marilee, that I wasn't completely honest on your questionnaire. Oh, I have short-term memory problems. But there's more. I've had to adapt to goals, standards, behavioral objectives, and benchmarks. I can do that. I've seen the pendulum swing from gifted to inclusion and now to No Child Left Behind. But what about me? I think I'm being left behind! I can't keep up with the technology. The electronic grade book, the Internet, e-mail, and instant messaging. My head just spins. I want to do a good job. I want to offer my students everything. But it just isn't fun anymore. I don't know how to remember all this new stuff!"

There are many nods of understanding. Before I can thank Ava, John breaks in. "I think my problem is completely different than anyone else's. My grade and content area is part of the testing program. My students get state tested, nationally tested, district tested, and any other testing that can be done. I'm getting pretty testy about the whole thing! I'm accountable for how my students do. I don't know how to teach anymore so that the students will remember what they need for the test. I have practically dropped my whole curriculum and now exclusively teach to one test or another. Can you help me?" John pleads.

I nod, "I know that each of you is struggling with your own mind. And I believe there are many things you can learn from this class that will make your memories better and help your students as well. Let's hear from Gail."

Gail squirms in her chair. "Well," she begins, "I feel as a teacher that I should really understand memory. Isn't that what I'm about—helping kids learn and remember? But the way things have been lately, I'm thinking of asking *them* for help!"

She pauses, and I encourage her to continue. "What are you noticing?"

"It all started when some former students stopped by at the beginning of the school year. I've always had great rapport with kids. I try to have a student-friendly classroom and lab. So, the students sometimes do come back to visit. Like I said earlier, I'm thirty-seven. I shouldn't be having memory problems yet!

"Anyway, these students show up at my door. I look up and smile. I am happy to see them . . . only I don't know whom I'm happy to see! I recognize that I had them, but I don't remember their names. I try to cover it up. I say, 'Hey, how are you? What are you two up to now?' They proceed to tell me which colleges they are attending, and I am racking my brain trying to think of names. It's not working, so I come up with a crazy idea. 'Say, why don't you two write a nice note on the board about this class—like how much you learned—and sign your names with the year you were here.' Thank heavens, they thought it was a great idea. They wrote the note, and the minute I saw their signatures, I felt like a dope. I knew exactly who they were, what period I had them, and where they sat.

"I was so relieved. But when they left, I was scared. What is wrong with my brain? Why can't I remember someone I saw every day for a whole semester or a whole year?"

The group becomes quiet as they look to me for answers.

"Your stories are unique to you. That's because each of us has a unique life and a unique brain. There are several lessons we can learn about memory. Once you understand them, I believe you will have power over your memory and have strategies to help your students with theirs. That may sound cliché, but it is true. In order to let you see how effort enhances our chances of remembering, we are going to study the wisest of animals."

"The owl?" Jack guesses. I shake my head.

"It must be the elephant. Elephants never forget, right?" asks Grace.

"My luck, if I were an elephant, I'd be Dumbo!" Jack quips.

"Grace is correct. I think I learned a lot about myself when I first heard this story. Listen and see what you think," I begin.

## YOU CAN ALWAYS REMEMBER IF YOU N.E.V.E.R. F.O.R.G.E.T.

Once upon a time, many, many years ago, in the jungle of Africa there lived the lion king, Nyack. Nyack was a very stately lion. He was eleven feet long from his nose to the tip of his tail. His beautiful mane was thick and luxurious. When Nyack walked through the jungle, he looked majestic, and many of the animals feared him.

One day, Nyack was strolling through the grasslands, as was his habit. He felt his job as king was a responsible position and that he must keep an eye on his land and its inhabitants. Besides, he was rather hungry and he thought perhaps he would spy a warthog for a midmorning snack.



In the distance, Nyack saw two zebras scurrying through the bush. He thought perhaps hunters were stalking them, but as he perused the area, he could see no danger. He continued his walk and almost stepped on some chimps that were scampering by. Nyack considered their flavor and decided not to pursue them.

As soon as the chimps disappeared, two mature giraffes came galloping by. Nyack's first thought was again of his hunger pangs. When he decided it was too nice a day to pursue an animal as large as a giraffe, he realized that all the animals he had passed—or who had passed him—were heading in the same direction. He wondered where they were going. The area they were heading toward was sometimes inhabited by a herd of elephants.

"Hmmm," he thought to himself, "a baby elephant might be a delightful morning treat!" So, he headed in that direction.

When Nyack came up to the clearing, he saw a curious sight. The animals that had passed him were standing and waiting in line to talk to an elephant! Nyack did not understand why they would do such a thing. He stood back and listened to the conversations.

"What do you want to know about?" one of the giraffes asked a chimp.

"I want to know what day the hunters are coming," answered one of the zebras.

"We are interested in knowing on what day the bananas will ripen," responded a chimp. "Why are you giraffes here? What do you want to know?"

"We're here to see if Opooit the elephant remembers where the tallest trees are with the sweetest leaves. We are very hungry today."

The chimps chuckled. "Of course Opooit remembers—elephants never forget!"

They were all nodding and laughing at the thought of Opooit forgetting anything. Nyack was not happy with these goings-on.

Suddenly Nyack roared. His roar can be heard for five miles, so you can imagine how loud and scary it sounded to the animals only a few feet away from him. They began to tremble.

"Why do you go to an elephant with such questions?" he continued to roar. "I am your king. You should come to me. I have all the answers."

The animals were ready to scramble away, but before they did, Morubisi, the wise old owl above them in a tree, began to speak.

"Whooo do you think you're kidding?" Morubisi asked of the lion. "You are only king because you are large and vicious. Animals are afraid of you. Would you answer these questions that the inhabitants of your kingdom ask? Are you capable of answering these questions? The squirrels are in line here. They have forgotten where they buried their nuts. Can you tell them?"



The trembling animals hesitated before running off. They wanted to hear the answers to Morubisi's questions.

Nyack coughed, as lions sometimes do when they have to think. The lion cough sounds like a low roar, and the sound keeps animals frozen in their tracks. Finally, Nyack spoke.

"I do not know where the squirrels hid their nuts. I am a busy king. I have many things to attend to." With that, Nyack walked away. For the first time, the animals saw him with his head bowed.

The animals relaxed and stayed in line waiting for Opooit to give them their much-needed information.

When the last of the creatures received their answers, Opooit thought it would be a good time for a nap. Just as he was preparing his bed, he heard some footsteps. He was surprised to see that Nyack was back. Opooit didn't know if he should greet him or run to protect his children. He chose to give Nyack the benefit of the doubt and waited for him to approach.

As Nyack got closer, even with poor elephant vision, Opooit could see that Nyack's head was down and he looked sad.

"What can I do for you, sire?" asked a respectful Opooit.

He watched as Nyack took off his crown and placed it on Opooit's table. "I am here to turn my kingdom over to you."

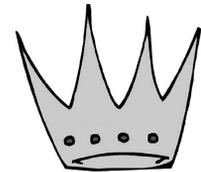


Shocked, Opooit raised his trunk and trumpeted. "I am not meant to be king of the jungle. That is your job."

"No," Nyack replied, "you are wrong. I cannot help my subjects as you can. You remember where they store their food. Without that information, they will not survive. You know when the hunters come. With that information, my subjects know when to hide and save their lives. You help them much more than I do. I do not deserve to be their king."

"But, Nyack," Opooit said, "you are the king. You protect your kingdom."

"I wouldn't have a kingdom to protect without you. You are more worthy than I. The kingdom is yours." With that, Nyack turned to leave.

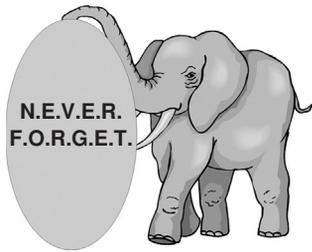


Opooit began to think of all of the things he needed to do. He did not want this added responsibility. Opooit had a family to take care of. In times of need, Opooit had to travel far to see members of his kin.

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Taking in a deep breath, Opooit announced, "I can help you remember all of this for your subjects."

Nyack turned and looked Opooit in the eye. "I am not a young lion, Opooit. My memory is not very good. Plus, I spend a great deal of time resting. I do not think you can help me."



"Oh yes, I can!" declared Opooit. "I can help you never forget!"

Nyack looked carefully at Opooit's home. On one of the trees was a sign that read N.E.V.E.R. F.O.R.G.E.T. He looked at the sign and back at Opooit. "Do you really believe you can teach this old lion how to remember so I can help my subjects?"

"I will teach you to N.E.V.E.R. F.O.R.G.E.T.," Opooit stated positively. "Come back tomorrow and we'll begin."

Nyack lifted his head up and walked back to his den.

"I think we've just about run out of time," I declare as I end the story.

"You mean you're going to leave us hanging here?" Ava asks disappointedly.

"I have a questionnaire I would like you to fill out. It will only take a few minutes. I would like you to keep it in your class notebook. By the end of this course, you will be able to determine why you answered yes to any of the questions and what you can do to help yourself. I also have a questionnaire that you can give your students.

"Taking control of your memory is a process. We'll learn the information and practice it over the entire course. I hope you'll take the opportunity to apply many of the concepts. For tonight, I would like you to reflect on the questions under 'Maintain Your Brain.' Next week we will begin to identify the first letter in N.E.V.E.R. F.O.R.G.E.T. Have a great week!"

## MAINTAIN YOUR BRAIN

- Think about memory problems you may be experiencing. Which character's issues resemble yours? Why?
- Look over your class roster(s). List the memory difficulties you see in your students. Are they similar to yours? Do most of the students have the same memory problems?

*(Text continues on page 15)*

**Figure 1.1** Memory Questionnaire for Adults

*Circle the word that best describes each statement.*

1. I forget names of people right after I am introduced to them.	Always	Sometimes	Never
2. I miss appointments.	Always	Sometimes	Never
3. I forget where I put my keys.	Always	Sometimes	Never
4. I forget where I park my car in a large parking lot.	Always	Sometimes	Never
5. I have trouble finding words when I speak.	Always	Sometimes	Never
6. I forget important dates like birthdays.	Always	Sometimes	Never
7. I forget what someone just told me.	Always	Sometimes	Never
8. I forget directions.	Always	Sometimes	Never
9. I forget what I just read.	Always	Sometimes	Never
10. I forget what I was saying.	Always	Sometimes	Never

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**Figure 1.2** Memory Questionnaire for Students

*Circle the word that best describes each statement.*

1. I forget to take my books and assignments home with me.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
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2. I forget to do my homework.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
--------	-----------	-------
3. I forget information the teacher told me the day before.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
--------	-----------	-------
4. I forget my multiplication tables.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
--------	-----------	-------
5. I think I know some dance steps, but when I try to dance I don't remember them.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
--------	-----------	-------
6. I forget my friends' phone numbers.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
--------	-----------	-------
7. I forget to bring paper or pencils when I run out at school.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
--------	-----------	-------
8. I have to borrow items from others when I should have them with me.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
--------	-----------	-------
9. I go to movies and forget what I saw a few days later.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
--------	-----------	-------
10. I rarely remember what I read in a textbook.  

Always	Sometimes	Never
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## **TRAIN THE STUDENT BRAIN**

- Begin a conversation with your students about memory. Make a list of the types of strategies they know and use.
- Use the questionnaire with your class as a basis for discussion or journaling.