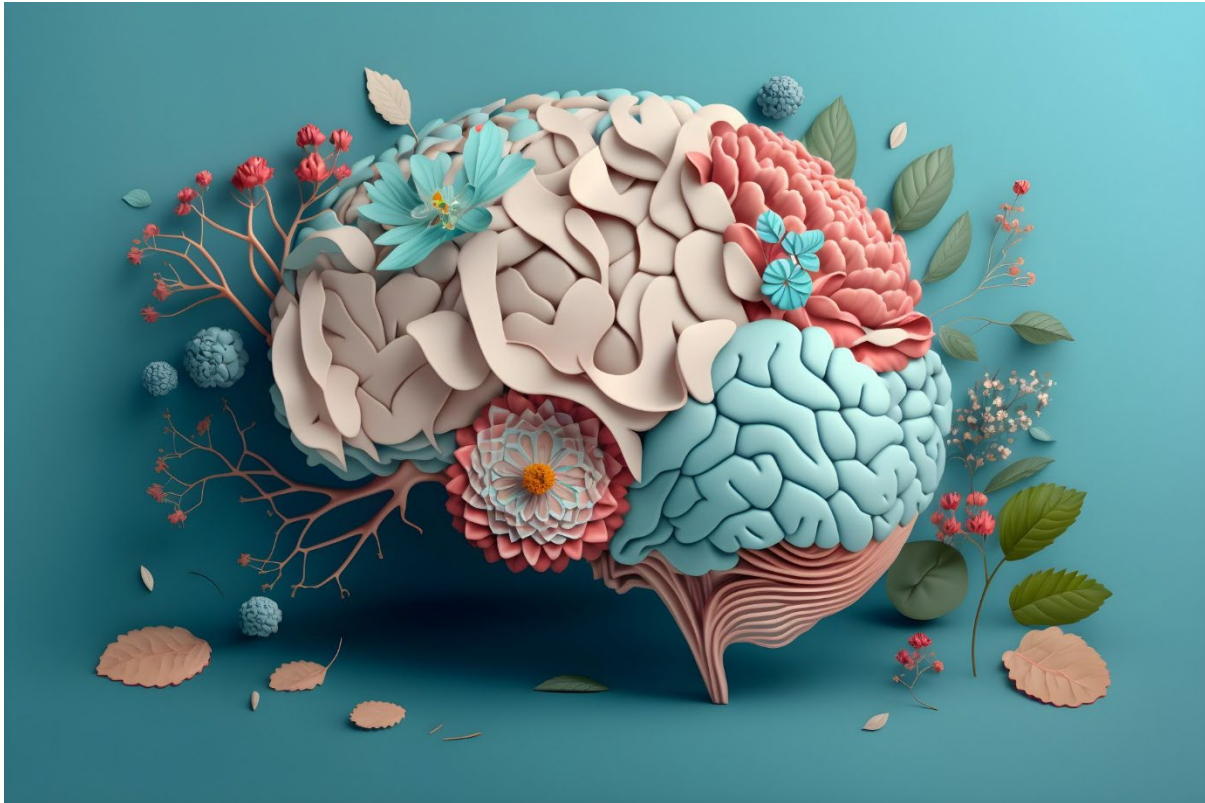




Retrieval practice

Retrieval simply means calling to mind something you've learned before, without using your notes. We all know that retrieval is usually required in exams to test what someone has learned, but the retrieval process itself is also essential for learning.

Every time you recall a piece of information, it strengthens the associated neural pathway, making it more likely that you'll successfully remember it in the future.

Unfortunately, some students avoid this method of studying because it can be more anxiety-inducing than simply re-reading their notes. Testing yourself feels hard!

But this challenge is actually what cognitive psychologists call a *desirable difficulty* – the effort involved in retrieving information is what helps create a longer-lasting memory.

How to include retrieval in your study sessions

- **Find practice tests and exams.** Some Unit Coordinators may allow students to access past years' exam papers for practice. Ask your Unit Coordinator or tutor if they do release past exam papers to all students in your unit.
- **Write your own questions** based on your notes and use them to test yourself.
- **Create and use flashcards to test yourself.** *Anki* is a great app for doing this digitally.
- **Try a "brain dump":** take a blank sheet of paper and write down everything you can remember about a particular topic.
- **Explain the concept to someone** without looking at your notes.

It's okay if you don't recall much when you first try retrieval – this is completely normal. Keep trying! The more you retrieve, the better. Even brief retrieval attempts are more effective than spending the same amount of time re-reading your notes.

For retrieval practice to work best, you need to return to the same information multiple times, leaving a few days between each attempt. For more information about how to combine this strategy with spaced repetition, refer to our academic skills resource on spaced repetition.

Other resources

- [Popular flashcard app: Anki.](#)
- [More info on retrieval practice.](#)

References

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