

## 7 Ways You Can Use Memory Research to Improve Communication

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Make short-term memory work for you. Research done in Germany over 100 years ago, and replicated many times since, indicates that human short-term memory can hold seven to ten items of information at one time. Advertisers, organizations, the government and others have used this knowledge extensively over the years.

Take a look at the following everyday uses of the seven-ten item concept:

Telephone numbers ( \_ \_ \_ ) - \_ \_ \_ - \_ \_ \_ \_ (ten numbers broken into three sections);

- Social Security numbers in the United States \_ \_ \_ - \_ \_ - \_ \_ \_ \_ (nine numbers in a group of three);
- Auto tag numbers in the United States (usually have a maximum of seven numbers/digits);
- Former service numbers for members of the military (for those old enough to remember these) were 7-10 digits;
- Seven Deadly sins;
- Seven-ten major characters on pop television shows (e.g. Gilligan's Island – Skipper, Gilligan, Mary Ann, Ginger, Professor, Mr. and Mrs. Howell or Star Trek [original series] – Captain James Kirk, Mr. Spock, Dr. Leonard McCoy, Lt. Uhura, "Scotty," Yeoman Rand, and Ensign Chekov);
- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs; and
- Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.

By following this basic memory format when presenting information to others, you improve the chances that they will get and retain the message that you intended. Here are seven tips for enhanced interpersonal communication using this concept:

1. Limit the items of information to seven-ten and emphasize whenever you are moving to the next point. For example, "The first point I'd like to make is..... The second point I want to emphasize is..."
2. Try chunking numbered or lettered information in the same manner in which social security and phone numbers are divided. For example, 000-00-000. Saying it in this manner helps the listener compartmentalize and visualize in groups up to seven or ten.
3. Use words that are easy to understand; preferably shorter one to three syllable words to aid comprehension and memory.
4. Help the listener retain the information by speaking slowly and pausing as you talk.
5. Create an environment where your listener does not feel pressured or distracted.

6. Encourage your listener(s) to ask questions.
7. Finally, ask listeners to periodically paraphrase back to you what they heard you say. This allows you to determine if they got your key points.

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