

Simple technique may help older adults better remember written information

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(Medical Xpress)—University of Florida researchers have advice for older adults who need to remember detailed written information: Don't just read it, tell someone about it.

That recommendation comes from a new UF study that showed that [older adults](#) who read a text and then described what they had read to someone else remembered more details of the text than older adults who simply re-read the passage multiple times.

The findings appear in the April issue of the journal *Aphasiology*.

Older adults are better able than younger adults to recall the gist of information they learn, but they have more difficulty remembering details, said lead investigator Yvonne Rogalski, who conducted the research as part of her doctoral dissertation work at the UF College of Public Health and Health Professions.

"Older adults can rely on things they've learned in the past and they can build on that vast wealth of semantic information that they've collected over the years. That works as long as the information is familiar, but where it breaks down is when they have to read something that is unfamiliar and has a lot of details," said Rogalski, now an assistant professor in the department of speech-language pathology and audiology at Ithaca College.

As a doctoral student Rogalski developed a training technique called

Read Attentively, Summarise and Review, or RASR, which requires participants to read a passage aloud and then summarize from memory what they've read after each paragraph. The training is designed to help people "encode" information and commit it to memory.

"In the reading aloud portion, attention is heightened because you know you're going to have to recall something," she said. "Then retrieving that information through the summaries has the ability to act as a secondary encoding. Reading and recalling the text paragraph by paragraph instead of the whole text is designed to reduce the information processing demands."

For the UF study, 44 healthy adults ages 60 to 75 used one of two methods to recall details from texts on real—but unusual—animals. Participants who used a technique called Read and Reread Attentively read the entire passage aloud once, and then re-read each paragraph three times aloud in succession. Those in the RASR group read the whole text aloud once, then for each paragraph they read it aloud, summarized it from memory and then re-read it aloud again. Participants in both groups were tested immediately after studying and 24 hours later.

The researchers found that participants who summarized the information aloud remembered more details about the texts than those who just re-read the material. In addition, combining the summarization method with an immediate post-test showed the most benefit for remembering text details after a 24-hour delay.

"We think it is effective because by reading the information and then putting it into your own words you have to do quite a bit of processing of not only the information, but also the relationships among bits of information," said Lori Altmann, an associate professor in the UF department of speech, language, and hearing sciences, and a study co-author along with John Rosenbek, also a professor in the department.

"Picking out the relationships that are important to you as you see them can help to order the information in your own memory."

Older adults can put the principles of the summarization technique to work for themselves whenever they want or need to learn detailed information, such as a magazine article or medication plan, the researchers say. They suggest that people read the [information](#) and then describe it from memory to a partner who can check for accuracy.

"The RASR method is a very functional treatment and it's something that healthy older adults or even people with mild dementias could use on their own to try and improve their memory," Altmann said. "It doesn't involve anything high-tech, and that's the beauty of it."

Provided by University of Florida

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