



Optimised Knowledge Retention

by Dr. Henry Khiat, UniSIM

At UniSIM, students generally take supervised, closed-book examinations. It is important that you are able to remember and recall relevant information and how to use them when answering examination questions. Some of you might have had the experience of sitting in the exam hall, staring blankly at the exam paper. This can be due to the reasons below.

- 1) **Lack of understanding** - If you do not understand the information (theories, concepts, models, etc.) presented in your course materials, you can easily forget them even after having memorised them.
- 2) **Cramming** - If you try to memorise all information near the examination date, you will have less time to practise using the information to work through past years' exam questions. And because you have not tried to put into practise what you've learnt, you'll find it difficult to retain and recall the information you have memorised.
- 3) **Insufficient clear cues** - At times, you may be so certain that you have sufficiently revised for the exam and that you'll remember the required information. However, you are unable to recall the information at the exams. This could be due to the fact that you're not given sufficient explicit cues to recall and retrieve each piece of information you have stored away during your revision.
- 4) **Exam anxiety** - At times, you may be so anxious and stressed during the exams that your mind draws a blank, and you cannot easily recall what you had revised when studying for the exams.

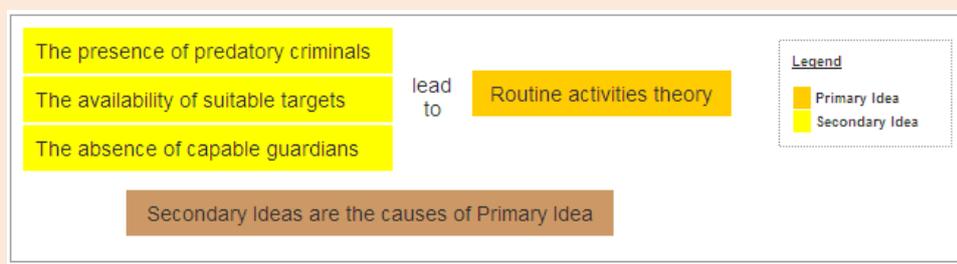
To ensure optimised retention of information for assessment, you can consider the suggestions below:

- a) You need to understand the information (theories, concepts, models, etc.) that you intend to remember. You can and should always clarify any doubts you may have about the information with your instructors or classmates. Only when you have understood the information in the course materials, should you start memorising them. A good set of self-made notes is very useful for information retention exercises.
- b) It is important that you space out your revision over a longer period of time, using repetitive practice sessions to recall and reinforce your understanding and application of the required knowledge for the course. Because of the huge amount of information that you need to learn and internalise, you would find it easier to remember and recall the information if you work with small, manageable chunks of information each time you sit down to revise.
- c) While spaced and repetitive practice is useful, it is also important that you overlearn. Overlearning is the process of continued memorisation, even when you think you already have memorised a chunk of information. Doing so would enable you to more quickly recall and retrieve the information during examination.



d) It is also important that you have a repertoire of methods for creating cues to the information you intend to memorise. This will allow you to more easily retrieve the required chunk of information easier. These methods can include mnemonic strategies such as:

- Acronyms / Catchwords
For example, **R**outine **A**ctivities **T**heory = **RAT**
- Imagery (Concept maps; Method of Loci)
For example, the three conditions of Routine Activities Theory are represented in a concept map below.



The Method of Loci involves placing a piece of information along an imaginary but familiar journey to the learner.

For example, to remember the conditions of RAT (Routine Activities Theory), one can imagine a short journey from his home to the bus stop:

- 1) opens home door and steps out (represents availability of suitable targets)
→ 2) walks by an unmanned neighbourhood police centre (represents the absence of capable guardians)
→ 3) reaches the bus-stop (represents the presence of predatory criminals).

- Catchphrases
For example, to remember that "Criminal," "Target," and "Guardian" are the three conditions of RAT, the catchphrase, "**C**live (Criminal) **t**alks (Target) to **G**ina (Guardian)" could be used.
- Forming associations
For example, to remember the three conditions of RAT, one may associate 1) the availability of suitable target with a man wearing a thick gold chain, 2) the presence of predatory criminals with a snatch thief lurking around, and 3) associate the presence of capable guardians with a policeman patrolling nearby.

Lastly, it is important to take note that the foundation of knowledge retention is related to the amount of effort and motivation you put into memorising the required knowledge.

Wish you all the best in revising for your exams!

References

Van Blerkom, D. L. (2009). *College study skills: Becoming a strategic learner*. Boston: Wadsworth.