HSC Study Tip # 18: Getting More Out of Learning Sessions

What's the best way of approaching learning sessions?

Should you ease yourself into learning sessions by starting with the easier materials, or is it better to start with something that's more difficult?
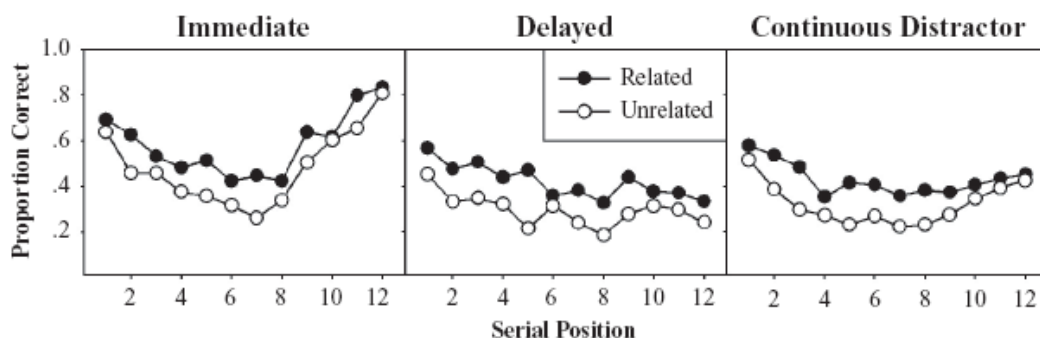
How should learning sessions be structured so you get the greatest benefit from them?

The pattern in remembering information is described by the serial position or primacy-recency effect.

It's been found that the ability to retrieve words from **lists of moderate length <u>immediately</u>** after delivery is generally greater across the end of a learning session (recency region) as compared to how much can be recalled from the beginning of a learning session (primacy region).

Early words (the primacy effect) receive more attention, are rehearsed to a greater degree, and are therefore more effectively stored in <u>long-term memory</u>. The first item is rehearsed by itself; the second is rehearsed along with the first, the third along with the first and second, and so on.

Later words (the recency effect) are remembered best of all as they are still stored in short-term memory when recall is solicited.
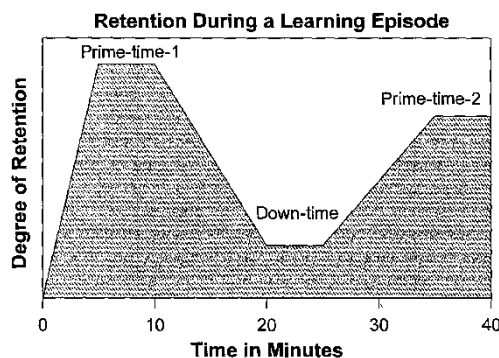

The Proportion of Words Remembered Under Different Conditions

However, when the list of words to be recalled is long, the reverse pattern is observed. The recency effect is weaker than the primacy effect as the length of words exceeds the capacity of short-term memory, and are lost. The ability to retrieve words from the primacy region is also greater than in the recency region when there's a delay between rehearsal and retrieval, or when rehearsal is conducted under distracting conditions.
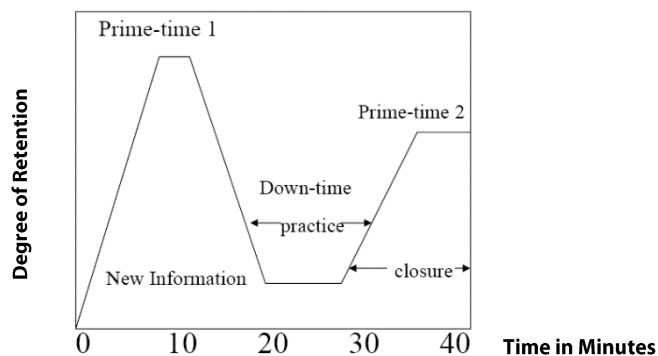
PTO

The Serial Position Effect & Slab Learning

In a learning episode where **large slabs of information** are being processed, we tend to remember the information being presented first (primacy effect), followed by what's presented last (recency effect). Note that the dip in recall between the primacy and recency effects is significant.

The figure below shows how the primacy-recency effect influences how much information we retain across a 40-minute learning session. Note that approximately 25% of each 40 minute period is spent in "down-time" – periods where concentration and learning effectiveness are reduced.

Retention During a Learning Episode

Implications For Learning:

- As retention of **large slabs** of information is highest across the primacy region, **we suggest that students start learning sessions with the most difficult sections or those sections that require the most learning.**

- The "down-times" should be used to reinforce materials that you don't understand or to practise and revise what you have learned, as it's more difficult for retention to occur across these periods. "Down times" further offer students the perfect opportunity to work through sample examination questions.

- Short term memory asks two simple questions to determine whether an item is saved or rejected:

  "Does this make sense?" (Can I understand the item?)
  "Does this have meaning?" (Is the item relevant?)

  Therefore, use the end of each learning session to consolidate what you have learned and develop sense and meaning. The greater the sense and meaning, the more effectively information is stored in long-term memory. Sense and meaning can be very easily established by rephrasing what has been learned in your own words, and preferably out loud.

Regards, TSFX