

NOTES FROM: *Moonwalking with Einstein*, by Joshua Foer

SUMMARY: This is a *fantastic* nonfiction book about memory and how to improve it, and it follows an attempt by the author to improve his memory by undergoing “elite memory training” and afterwards entering the world memory championships.

This might sound dumb, or like I'm exaggerating or something, but I was literally pumping my fist as he tells the story of his final showdown in the memory championships at the end of the book. It's *far* more exciting than it sounds, and this was one of my first “favorite books.” I still recommend it fairly often, even after finishing it many years ago.

It's not only an incredible book, it's also extraordinarily *helpful*, and it taught me that, in the end, all we really have at the end of our lives is our memories. So, we may as well go out and make them as memorable as possible!

“Monotony collapses time; novelty unfolds it. You can exercise daily and eat healthily and live a long life, while experiencing a short one. If you spend your life sitting in a cubicle and passing papers, one day is bound to blend unmemorably into the next - and disappear. That's why it's so important to change routines regularly, and take vacations to exotic locales, and have as many new experiences as possible that can serve to anchor our memories. Creating new memories stretches out psychological time and lengthens our perception of our lives.”

“Life seems to speed up as we get older because life gets less memorable as we get older.”

Store memories in linear chains and link them together. Free-floating memories that aren't attached to any other memories get lost. For example, it's easier to remember something if you remember what else you were doing that day, with whom, in what order, etc. Trying to remember events out of context is much more difficult.

Distribute images of memories across *spatial paths* in your mind. Basically, take a tour of your house, or another place you're very familiar with, and 'place' memories in all your most familiar places. Practice going through all the “rooms” and retrieving the memories you've stored there. This technique, also called a “memory palace” has been used successfully for thousands of years.

We remember things in context. This goes back to linking memories together and making sure they're attached to something substantial, a context. An idea that makes you think of another idea is going to be more easily remembered than some abstract idea that isn't attached to anything else.

“When you want to get good at something, how you spend your time practicing is far more important than the amount of time you spend.”

“Our lives are the sum of our memories. How much are we willing to lose from our already short lives by not paying attention?”

“A meaningful relationship between two people cannot sustain itself only in the present tense.”

“Psychologists have discovered that the most efficient method is to force yourself to type 10 to 20 percent faster than your comfort pace and to allow yourself to make mistakes. Only by watching yourself mistype at that faster speed can you figure out the obstacles that are slowing you down and overcome them. By bringing typing out of the autonomous stage and back under conscious control, it is possible to conquer the OK plateau.”

“Students need to learn how to learn. First you teach them how to learn, then you teach them what to learn.”

'Chunking' is the grouping of information together for easier recall. We do this whenever we remember the first three digits of a phone number together, followed by the last four. It's much easier to remember this way than trying to recall seven random numbers in a row.

Our lives are structured by our memories of events. We remember our first day of school, the day we got our driver's license, graduation, our first job, etc. What you were doing five years ago probably won't mean anything to you unless it's associated with an event.

Creating as many memories as possible is inconceivably important to experiencing a long and rich life. Since memories are all we'll have at the end, we should probably focus on storing up memories rather than possessions. Not only that, but time seems to speed up as we get older because we fall into a routine where nothing memorable happens. Breaking out of that and making memories is key.

Socrates: “The unexamined life is not worth living.”

Older memories appear more like some third person holding a camera. Newer memories appear in the first person. The mind also remembers very vivid and unusual images more clearly, hence the title, *Moonwalking with Einstein*. It's a memory device used to help store information in the mind.

“Song is the ultimate structuring device for language.”

“Do the action at the same time as learning the word in order to make it stick.”

“We tend to remember what we pay attention to.”

“Memory is like a spiderweb that catches new information. The more it catches, the bigger it grows. And the bigger it grows, the more it catches.”