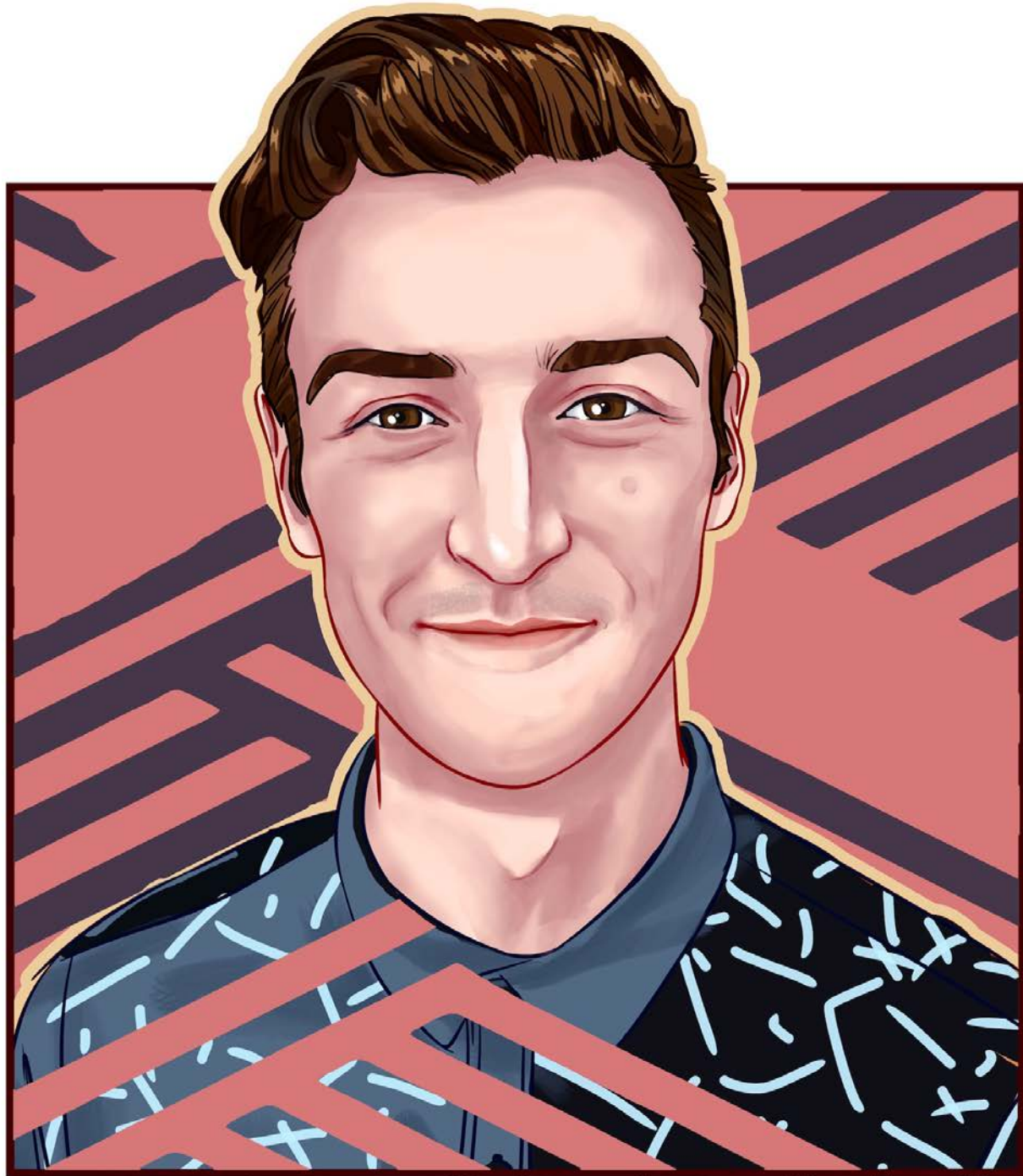


Jeremy's English Tips

Episode #7: Spaced repetition



Culips English Podcast

Transcript

Hello everyone, this is Jeremy and you're listening to Jeremy's English Tips, a series by the Culips English Podcast where I teach you interesting expressions or share language learning tips.

Hey there Culips listeners! Welcome back to another episode of Jeremy's English tips. In this episode, we are going to talk about something called **spaced repetition**.

But before we get into the topic for today's episode, I want to remind you that there is a study guide available on our website at culips.com. You can head on over there to check it out, give it a download, and study along as you listen. All right, let's get started.

Spaced repetition is a way of studying vocabulary words, usually in a foreign language, and it is scientifically proven to help you learn more efficiently. So, in this episode we are going to talk about why spaced repetition is so effective and how it works.

Have you ever studied with flashcards before? If you have, then you probably know that you end up becoming very familiar with some words and have a very difficult time remembering other words. That was definitely the case for me before I found out about spaced repetition. So, instead of looking at every flashcard every day, spaced repetition means that you only expose yourself to a certain number of words per day. And these words are specifically the words that are most difficult for you or are new words. So each time you show yourself a flashcard, you are exposing yourself to that word. If that word is something you already know very well, then there is no reason to continue exposing yourself to that word, right? You have already learned it. So instead, **you should focus your vocabulary study on the words that are most difficult for you to remember and spaced repetition does this for you.**

So, let's talk about forgetting for just a moment. I know most people probably think that forgetting is a bad thing. If we forget someone's name, or if we forget someone's birthday, we usually feel bad. However, forgetting is a very important part of our daily lives. Can you imagine remembering everything you ever heard or saw in your entire life, there are people who have brain deformities that caused this to happen for them. And they have said that it is

debilitating. They cannot live a normal life and are absolutely overwhelmed by simple social experiences. So, forgetting is very, very important. With vocabulary study, it is also very important.

So why is that? Why is forgetting so important? Well, our brain likes novelty. Novelty means something is interesting or new. In order to make each exposure to a word novel or interesting, we need to forget about that word for a little while, and then be reminded again, so we can say, "Oh yeah! I remember this word." At this moment, your brain lights up, you get a squirt of dopamine, which is a neurotransmitter, a brain chemical that motivates us to keep going.

This principle is true with people as well. If you see someone every day, sometimes you start to get bored with them. But if they're gone for a while, maybe a month, or even a year, and then you see them again, we often feel much more happy to see them. We say, oh, how have you been? Long time no see. So the same principle is true with words here as well.

Now, **studying too many words too quickly can also be a bad thing**. People often call this cramming and this causes indigestion in a way. Do you know what indigestion is? This is when you eat too much food and your body cannot digest the food fast enough. I'm sure most of us have experienced this. We feel very uncomfortable, our stomach is bulging out, and we usually just want to sleep.

This is kind of what happens when we try to study too many words too quickly. **Our brain needs time to digest the new words**. But if we keep "eating", quote unquote, then we will fill our metaphorical stomachs. And just like our stomach, our brain needs time to digest. In other words, our brain needs time to process the new information before we expose it to more new information. Now, **exposing yourself to a word less and less frequently over time helps to push that word into your long term memory**.

We all have two kinds of memory, we have short term memory, and long term memory. If someone tells you their name when you meet them for the first time, you are using your short term memory to keep their name in mind. However, if someone asks you what school you went to when you were young, or where you're from, or what your parents did for a living, these are things that are stored in your long term memory. So our goal as language learners,

is to move these new words from our short term memory into our long term memory. And this can be done by exposing yourself to each word less and less frequently over time.

To make this a little clearer. Let's look at it this way. Have you ever seen someone on the street multiple times in the same day, perhaps on your way to and from work or when you are out and about? Then later, you don't see them for a long time. And you think, "Hmm, I wonder what happened to that person? I wonder where they went?" And then when you are traveling in a new city, you randomly see them walking down the street. Wouldn't you be surprised to see them? Wouldn't you think, "Whoa, there's that person. I used to see that person on my way to work all the time."

If you have ever had this kind of experience, then you know what it feels like to get a shot of dopamine in your brain. This is the reward chemical, the reward neurotransmitter, and it indicates novelty. All of a sudden, seeing that person in a new city made them very interesting to you. Even if you never say a word to that person, you will likely remember them for a very, very long time. There is something to be said, for these random novel experiences, and how they affect our memory. So when you study words, your goal is the same. If you see a word every day for months, you will become very familiar with that word, but it might lose its novelty. And so it may be difficult to get that word into your long term memory. Thankfully, there are applications that do all of this for you.

One of them is called Anki A-N-K-I and this is probably the most well known spaced repetition application, but there are many others. Anki can be used on your smartphone or on your computer, or both, if you like. You can enter your own vocabulary words or download decks, as they are called, decks of flashcards made by other people. In my experience, it's best to make your own decks because you remember where and when you found that word. When you study with the app if you can't remember the word, then the application will remember that and it will show you that word more frequently. If a word is very easy for you, then the application will show you that word later and later, maybe next week, or maybe next month. So, all of this scheduling is handled by the algorithm in the application. Anki and other apps like it are called SRS systems. So you can do a little Google search if you like to find one that suits you.

So, that's it for this episode of Jeremy's English Tips. I hope you found it helpful. Why don't you go out and give it a try? Maybe you can download Anki or another similar application and try studying some words of your own or a deck made by others if you like.

Try it out for yourself and let us know how it goes. You can contact us at contact@culips.com or anywhere on social media. We hope you enjoyed this episode, and I'll see you in the next one. Bye, everyone.

Key points

1. **Spaced repetition is a scientifically proven way to learn words more efficiently.**
“Space” means that there is a gap in time between “repetitions” of exposures to a word.
See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spaced_repetition
2. **Forgetting is necessary for remembering.** Our brain likes “novelty”. In order to make each exposure to a word novel, we need to forget about it for a little while then be reminded again. “Oh yeah! I remember this word”. Same is true with people.
3. **Studying too many words too quickly can be bad.** Often called “cramming.” This causes “indigestion.” The brain needs time to digest the new words and phrases it is exposed to
4. **Exposing yourself to a word less frequently over time helps push that word into your long term memory.**
5. **Apps like “Anki” can help you do this, but there are many others.**

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. In your own words, how would you define spaced repetition?
2. Why is forgetting important?
3. Does “cramming” work for you? Why or why not?
4. How do you currently study vocabulary?
5. What do you think about spaced repetition? Do you think it will work for you or not?

Study Challenges

1. Try using Anki for one month and see if it helps you learn better.
2. Tell a friend, in English, about spaced repetition and see what they think.

Credits

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