



## The Baker/baker paradox



“A researcher shows two people the same photograph of a face and tells one of them that the guy is a baker and the other one that his last name is Baker. A couple days later, the researcher shows the same two guys the same photograph and asks for the accompanying word. The person who was told the man’s profession is much more likely to remember it than the person who was given his surname. Why should that be? Same photograph. Same word. Different amount of remembering.”

I can remember the telephone number of my grandmother who died twenty years ago but can’t call my son on his cell phone from my landline. I can remember the first twenty elements in the periodic table, can recite a first declension Latin noun and deliver the speaking part of Elvis’ *Are you Lonesome tonight?* verbatim. I open a cupboard and can’t remember why.

I can remember the moment I “cracked” how to remember.

Revising History GCSE, Causes of WWI, I made a list of twenty points, capitalised the first word of each and constructed a memory aid (the ruder the more memorable) from the letters. I was suddenly aware of how to train my memory. And recalling information in the actual exam became easy; all I had to do was remember the rude mnemonic and I was away.

### How can I support my son’s revision?

Nowadays, students don’t have to stumble across memory techniques, but are actively taught how to retrieve knowledge. Students in Y11, Y12 and Y13 will be participating in presentations from [Elevate Education](#), a company specialising in study skills which make a tangible difference to marks in examinations. All staff have also received the training so we can reinforce the skills the students are using to improve their exam performance. If you would like to support your sons at home, try the following advice from Elevate:

1. Students should **finish** making revision notes 3 weeks prior to the exams. The remaining time should be spent completing Practice Papers (available on exam board websites).
2. Encourage your sons to **colour code topic lists** for each subject Red/Amber/Green according to their understanding. They should start with the Red topics.
3. Use a colour coding **system** across all notes e.g. Green for Dates; Names in Blue. This will make it easier to retrieve information.
4. Use Mindmaps - electronic or paper versions (try [XMind](#) or [iMindMap](#))
5. Process information by making Flash Cards ([Anki](#)) and Quiz Cards ([Quizlet](#)) with key information. Collaborate with other students and draw cards randomly from a hat. Try [memorize](#) or [memrise](#)
6. Set up places on Instagram where friends can photograph and upload spider diagrams and notes to share.
7. A whole practice paper can be too overwhelming in the beginning. Start by completing a section or two **with** notes; then shift to timed conditions **without** notes; mark and ask for **feedback** to ensure knowledge gaps are filled.
8. Temporarily block off the distractions of social media. Try [ColdTurkey](#) or [SelfControl](#).

## Moonwalking with Einstein

The reason behind the Baker/baker paradox, according to Joshua Foer, author of the brilliant book *Moonwalking with Einstein, The Art and Science of Remembering Everything*, is that when we hear the man in the picture is a baker the fact “becomes embedded in a whole network of ideas about what it means to be a baker: he cooks bread, he wears a big white hat, he smells good when he comes home from work. The name Baker, on the other hand, is tethered only to a memory of a person’s face. That link is tenuous, and should it dissolve, the name will float off irretrievably.” Find out more by listening to Joshua Foer’s [Tedtalk](#).

And it seems to work. Students I teach may remember their first activity. All 30 have to come up with a connection between their name and themselves. “First name *Duane* – tallest in the class, the Great Duane,” says one; “Surname *Changer* – everyone laughs at me because I change my hairstyle every day,” says another. Thirty names learnt in fifteen minutes.

Apparently you can save forty days a year by not having to remember things you have forgotten. Just think about that...

Once again, thank you to all parents who respond to our AGS Learner updates, particularly the very creative parents who emailed last month with objects representing resilience! Please continue to share ideas that we can pass on, or contact me ([vbeckley@ags.bucks.sch.uk](mailto:vbeckley@ags.bucks.sch.uk)) or Gurdeep Singh, Assistant Head ([gsingh@ags.bucks.sch.uk](mailto:gsingh@ags.bucks.sch.uk)) if you would like any further information.