

## Steps for Memorizing Lines and Developing Character Simultaneously

Why do we forget the next line? Because people think in pictures/images not words. When you say elephant you don't see the letters E L E P H A N T, you see an image of an elephant. Actors forget lines because we are struggling to think of words— WORDS not images (but images is how we think).

Route memorization techniques, such as highlighting lines in yellow, covering them with a paper, using a tape recorder, note cards with cue on one side and your line on other are in direct conflict with how we think. Route memorization is also in direct conflict with acting techniques, improv, etc.

How do I connect to the next image, the next thought, the next feeling. Its all about imagery. Language is a proxy for concepts, images.

If you thought that memorizing your text was steering you away from your instincts and impulses, and by extension your heart and soul, would you be willing to explore another path? Assuming you say yes, Kimberly Vaughn offers a perspective on why memorization alone can be and often is a roadblock we must navigate after the fact.

The **left brain** is where memorization occurs. The left brain is in charge of sequential, analytical and logical thought. It's practical, detail-oriented, strategic. It's the home of speech and language.

The **right brain** is more spatial and visual; it is nonlinear, intuitive and holistic. It sees the big picture. It plays a role in language, particularly in interpreting context—the circumstances in which an event occurs. It is emotional, imaginative, intuitive, and risk-taking.

The **left and right brain** “talk” to each other every minute of every day.

How do we wed the “conversation” between memorizing the text (left brain) and living the text (right brain)? If by definition we do not emote, intuit, interpret, or trust risk-taking impulses with our left brain, we will not inhabit our text through memorization. We can learn it but we cannot live it.

If we could adopt a new way of memorizing that would immediately begin to incorporate our emotions, instincts, and impulses, wouldn't we be on our way toward the desired result? In other words, our brain hemispheres would be communicating in concert to help us more readily and seamlessly inhabit the text and live the character on the page. so we do not memorized AND THEN make acting choices. The philosophy is: taking the line and turning it into an active image, that's full of emotion, that's full of doing, that's full of senses. Connected to the material. With traditional line memorization methods you will probably end up with the image after many rehearsals, but you can get there sooner with this method.

Here is a simple, effective technique Kimberly Vaughn designed to combine the benefits of both our left and right brain during memorization.

Step 1: Sit in a comfortable place ... with pad of paper and pencil (not pen).

Step 2: Grab your monologue text, or your script to refer to.

Step 3: Write the first sentence on your pad of paper and **speak the words out loud as you write**; not after you write, but as you write the sentence. This way, you are writing, speaking, and in essence, drawing the words into your muscles, both mentally and physically. You are beginning to viscerally digest your words.

Note: Your goal is to write and speak as much of the text as you remember each time, adding more text as you go until you have learned the entire piece.

Step 4: Notice how different the sentence begins to feel to you when you write and say it as opposed to silently memorizing it repetitively. Example: “If I loved you, time and again I would try to say all I'd want you to know.” Before I can move to the second phrase, I am stopped by the first phrase to consider exactly what I mean. Do I love this person in this moment, or am I musing about love and specifically love with this person? Do you see how this time taken with your words allows you to begin to experience them viscerally and find your interpretation? Then, the next phrase, “time and again I would try to say all I'd want you to know,” brings even more opportunity to explore the words and feel the specific emotions that are triggered. And, you begin to decide who you are and what you can and cannot do as this person.

For example: “Time and again I would *try* to say.” Oh, you think, I must not be very sure of myself or why would I say “try”? Why wouldn't I say “time and again I would *always* say.” You see? You are building your

character while you memorize. By writing and speaking your text aloud, you will have begun to experience yourself as this person, and you'll be much closer to inhabiting your character. With this method, it will be unlikely that you'll ever forget your lines because you will have imprinted them on your right brain while simultaneously memorizing them with your left. To your success!

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Here are some classic memorization techniques by Bruce Miller. Many of these classic techniques are outdated and should be used cautiously. I have underlined the more important ones.

“Here's a summary of an article on Memorization he wrote for *Dramatics* a few years ago. Here follows a list of memorization suggestions contributed by others or mentioned or implied. Try them out as your time and energy allows.”

1. Treat memory as you would a muscle. Do it regularly and get better at it. Increase the amounts you take on to memorize each day as your ability grows.
2. Find a time of day that best works for you to memorize. Consider that time sacred and make sure you use your best time for memorizing whenever possible.
3. Memorize before you go to bed and sleep on it.
4. Repeat lines in your head all through the day.
5. Read the lines over and over before trying to memorize them.
6. Learn the ideas and their interconnectedness before trying to memorize.
7. Learn the story of the lines before you learn the lines.
8. Say your lines aloud rather than in your head.
9. Say your lines aloud and in your head.
10. Say your lines while moving around.
11. Picture your lines as images as you say them.
12. Remember the feelings that the words and images create, not just the words.
13. Write your lines down before you memorize them. Write them as you are memorizing them.
14. See all of your lines in a scene as one big whole. Rewrite them as though they are a monologue. Examine this monologue in terms of its dramatic progression. Divide into its beginning section, middle section, and concluding section. Then divide each section into its constituent parts. Once you understand all of each section, and its cause and effect relation, then memorize.
15. Figure out what the character is actually saying when he says what he says before trying to memorize it. (This is not the same thing as memorizing the way to say it. That should be avoided absolutely.)
16. Use mnemonic devices to help remember lists. Anagrams, rhymes, silly sentences, and song tunes, for instance, can be all effective.
17. Tape your part into a recorder and once you have memorized sections, repeat it along with your taped version.
18. Learn the part by listening and reciting with your taped version.
19. Listen to your taped version and develop specific gestures, movements, and business that you actually do while listening. Eventually, the physicalities will help you remember the lines.
20. Memorize by beats. Learn a beat, add a beat, repeat the already learned and add the new beat.

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Here is an extension of the *Backstage* article written by Phillip Goodchild, Valrico FL.:

What I do, after writing out my lines, is to write out the lines again, but only the first letter of each word. This allows me to write them out at the speed of natural speech. If I was memorizing the first sentence of this post, it would look like this as I write it out: S g-t f m. L t a f B, t.

I include the punctuation, to give me the sense of the inflections and tones. It aids one in remembering the whole line by giving you a one letter cue, and is easier to carry around as it usually ends up compacting a whole script onto one or two pages. The students who have tried this method, swear by it. It's just one more potential trick you can share with your students. It's my preferred method as a visual learner.

Tim Mooney, Prospect Heights IL writes:

I wrote three chapters on memorization as part of my book, "Acting at the Speed of Life." Also, I'm in the early phases of my next book, "How Do You Remember All Those Lines?"

These notes are drawn from *4 Steps for Memorizing Lines and Developing Character Simultaneously* by Kimberly Vaughn, posted Oct. 2, 2014, on *Backstage.Com*, and Jared Kelner's book *LINE? The Creative Way for Actors to Quickly Memorize Monologues and Dialogues*. and his interviews with Ben Wiggins, an article from *Backstage* written by Phillip Goodchild, Valrico FL, and an article on Memorization Bruce Miller for *Dramatics Magazine*.