

# How drawing can help you remember

Linda Blair, Daily Telegraph, 22 August 2016

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/wellbeing/mood-and-mind/how-drawing-can-help-you-remember/>

Do you have certain things you particularly need to remember? Rather than list writing or 'mind mapping' it seems you'll have the best chance of doing so if you get out a pencil and paper and draw what you want to recall.

This is the conclusion reached by Jeffrey Wammes and his team of researchers at the University of Waterloo in Canada. They were interested in discovering the most reliable way to enhance memory.

The good news is that the quality of the drawings doesn't seem to matter - you'll still gain the benefits.

They began by giving a large group of students a list of 40 easy-to-visualise words such as 'apple'.

They allotted the students 40 seconds per word.

They asked half of them to copy each word repeatedly while the other half were instructed to draw a picture of each one.

Next, they asked everyone to complete what's known as a 'filler task' — in this case, to classify the pitch of a set of musical tones. Having had no previous warning, the students were then asked to try to remember as many of the words as possible.

Those who had been asked to draw the words they'd been given remembered more than twice as many as did those who were asked to copy the words.

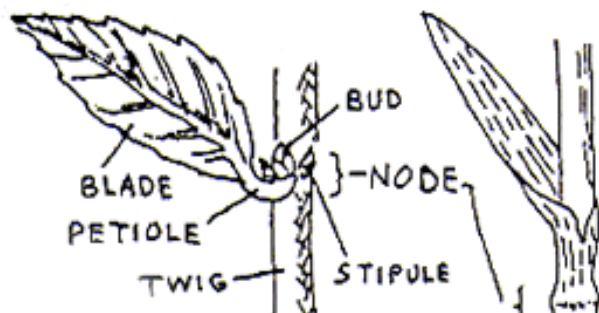
To make sure that drawing was the reason for the improved recall and not any other factor, the team then conducted a series of further experiments.

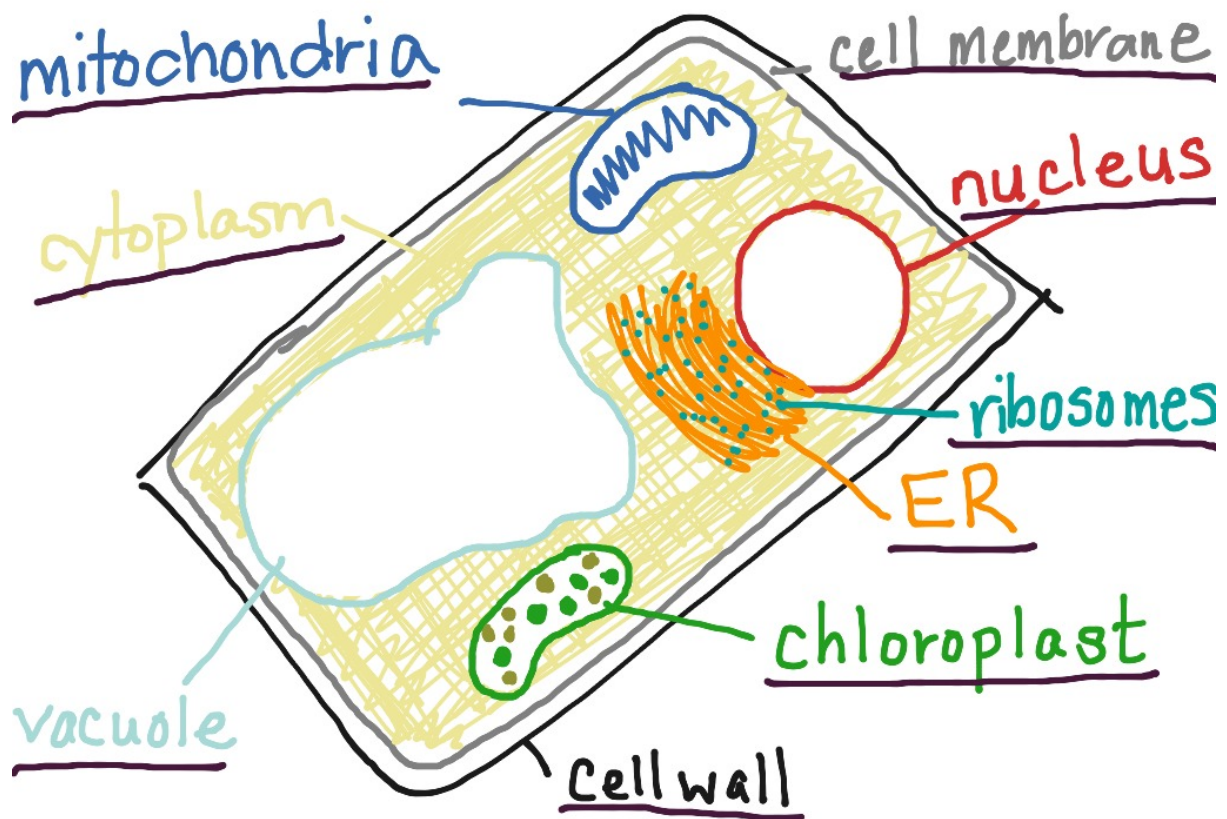
They asked some students to write the words and then to add visual details, for example doodling or shading letters.

They asked others to create mental images of the words;

others to look at pictures of the objects depicted by those words; still others to list physical characteristics of each

word on the list. Every time, those who drew pictures of the words remembered more of them than those who were asked to use any other strategy.





### **Why is it that drawing is such a powerful aide-memoire?**

The keys are effort and meaning. In a famous paper published in 1972, Fergus Craik and Robert Lockhart proposed that memory is a by-product of how deeply we process the information we wish to remember.

The more work we put into learning the material — and in particular, the more we attempt to understand what it means and relate the material to our own experience — the more likely we are to remember it.

When we draw something we've read, we must translate the language into an image, and this will of course require us to call up other examples of that information from personal experience.

We then engage our motor skills to draw it. As Wammes put it, it is this 'seamless integration of semantic, visual and motor aspects' that creates such a strong memory trace.

So next time you want to give yourself the best chance of remembering something, try your hand at drawing it. The good news is that the quality of the drawings doesn't seem to matter - you'll gain the benefits even if you don't consider yourself to be much of an artist.

*Linda Blair is a clinical psychologist.*