A Memory for All Seasoning

One evening two years ago, Peter Polson, a member of the psychology department at the University of Colorado, took his son and daughter to dinner at Bananas, a fashionable restaurant in Boulder. When the waiter took their orders, Polson noticed that the young man didn't write anything down. He just listened, made small talk, told them that his name was John Conrad, and left. Polson didn't think this was exceptional: There were, after all, only three of them at the table. Yet, he found himself watching Conrad closely when he returned to take the orders at a nearby table of eight. Again the waiter listened, chatted, and wrote nothing down. When he brought Polson and his children their dinners, the professor couldn't resist introducing himself and telling Conrad that he had been observing him.

The young man was pleased. He wanted customers to notice that, unlike other waiters, he didn't use a pen and paper. Sometimes, when they noticed, they left him quite a large tip. He had once handled a table of nineteen complete dinner orders without a single error. At Bananas, a party of nineteen (a bill of roughly $200) would normally leave the waiter a $35 tip. They had left Conrad $85.

Polson was impressed enough to ask the waiter whether he would like to come to the university’s psychology lab and let them run some tests on him. Anders Ericsson, a young Swedish psychologist recently involved in memory research, would be joining the university faculty soon and Polson thought that he would be interested in exploring memory methods with the waiter. Conrad said he would be glad to cooperate. He was always on the lookout for ways to increase his income, and Polson told him he would receive $5 an hour to be the subject of the experiment.

Conrad, of course, was not the first person with an extraordinary memory to attract attention from researchers. Alexander R. Luria, the distinguished Soviet psychologist, studied a Russian newspaper reporter named Shereshevskii for many years. Luria says that Shereshevskii was able to hear fifty words spoken once and recite them back in perfect order fifteen years later. Another important example of extraordinary memory, the conductor Arturo Toscanini, was known to have memorized every note for every instrument in 250 symphonies and 100 operas.

For decades the common belief among psychologists was that memory was a fixed quantity; an exceptional memory, or a poor one, was something with which a person was born.

This point of view has come under attack in recent years; expert memory is no longer universally considered the exclusive gift of the genius, or the abnormal. "People with astonishing memory for pictures, musical scores, chess positions, business transactions, dramatic scripts, or faces are by no means unique," wrote Cornell psychologist Ulric Neisser in Memory Observed (1981). "They may not even be very rare." Some university researchers, including Polson and Ericsson, go a step further than Neisser. They believe that there are no physiological differences at all between the memory of a Shereshevskii or a Toscanini and that of the average person. The only real difference, they believe, is that Toscanini trained his memory, exercised it regularly, and wanted to improve it.

Like many people with his capacity to remember, Toscanini may also have used memory tricks called mnemonics. Shereshevskii, for example, employed a technique known as loci. As soon as he heard a series of words, he mentally "distributed" them along Gorky Street in Moscow. If one of the words was "orange," he might visualize a man stepping on an orange at a precise location on the familiar street. Later, in order to retrieve "orange," he would take an imaginary walk down Gorky Street and see the image from which it could easily be recalled. Did the waiter at Bananas have such a system? What was his secret?
8 John Conrad would be the subject of Anders Ericsson's second in-depth study of the machinations of memory. As a research associate at Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Ericsson had spent the previous three years working on an extensive study of Steve Faloon, an undergraduate whose memory and intellectual skills were considered average. When Ericsson and Chase began testing Faloon, he could remember no more than seven random digits (numbers) after hearing them spoken once. According to generally accepted research, almost everyone is capable of storing five to nine random digits in short-term memory. After twenty months of working with Chase and Ericsson, Faloon could memorize eighty digits.

A. What do the following words from the text refer to?
   1. **him** (para. 1, line 9) refers to ________________.
   2. **them** (para. 4, line 4) refers to ________________.
   3. **it** (para. 6, line 9) refers to ________________.
   4. **his secret** (para. 7, line 7) refers to the secret of ________________.

B. Find words in the text which mean the following. DO NOT change the form of the words and write ONE WORD ONLY.
   1. **help** (para. 3) (v): ____________________
   2. **well-known and respected** (para. 4) (adj): ____________________
   3. **remembered** (para. 7) (v): ____________________
   4. **chosen by chance** (para. 8) (adj): ____________________

C. Read the text and answer the questions.
   1. Why does the writer mention Arturo Toscanini?
      __________________________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________________________.
   2. What is *loci*? What did Shereshevskii use it for?
      __________________________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________________________.
   3. What does the study of Steve Faloon show?
      __________________________________________________________________________
      __________________________________________________________________________.

D. Mark the best choice
   1. The main idea of Paragraph 6 is that ________________
      a) some scientists think that extraordinary memory is not something rare
      b) everyone has about the same memory capacity
      c) Polson and Ericsson went a step further than Neisser
      d) Toscanini trained his memory regularly
   2. Which of the following can be inferred from the text?
      a) The reason why Conrad joined the research was that he wanted to become famous.
      b) Some scientists believe that it is impossible to meet people with exceptional memory quite often.
      c) A good or bad memory is an ability that a person is born with and cannot change to a great degree.
      d) Scientists have not yet proved whether outstanding memories are inborn (something with which a person was born) or developed later in life.
Text II

When Alphabet Soup Is On the Menu for Life

WB Yeats, despite becoming one of the most famous poets and winning the Nobel Prize for literature, never learnt to spell. As a child, he had to be taught at home by his father, because he was so bad at school. He once wrote that his father had thrown a book at his head, in frustration at his inability to grasp the basics of reading and writing.

When Yeats was a child, dyslexia was no excuse for being bad at those things. Even in the 50’s, when writer John Irving was a child, bad spelling was considered to be a psychological problem. He was referred to a psychiatrist but subsequently became an internationally acclaimed author. Agatha Christie was, by her own admission, an extraordinarily bad speller.

David Bailey, the photographer, is proud to be dyslexic. “At the age of 59, I have yet to write a letter,” he has said, “At school, I was put in the class for the stupid, but maybe dyslexics are the clever ones. Who wants to be an academic? Most of them are visually illiterate.” So many famous artists, writers, musicians, poets and actors have been dyslexic that he might have a point. Even acknowledged geniuses like Leonardo da Vinci and Albert Einstein couldn't spell.

Multi-millionaire businessman Richard Branson says that he was beaten several times a week for poor classwork and still couldn't read at the age of eight. Aisling Oman says she fared a bit better, because of the fact that her elder brother had already been diagnosed as dyslexic and her parents were able to recognize the symptoms. As a result, Aisling was confident enough to inform all of her teachers of her own diagnosis.

But just what is dyslexia, if it's not a disease? The word itself comes from the Greek and simply means “difficulty with words”. According to the British Dyslexia Association, it's not a disease, but instead, it's a difference in the brain area that deals with language, affecting the underlying skills that are needed to learn to read, write and spell. Many people will never be diagnosed and will instead go through life believing they are stupid or slow.

According to the Dyslexia Institute in Britain, there is a hypothesis that dyslexic people often have visual, spatial and lateral thinking abilities that other people don't have. “Yes,” Aisling agrees. “When I was at school, I was good at metalwork. You tend to be much better at things which don't involve books. Better with your hands.” Just like another famous person, chef and TV celebrity Jamie Oliver. Jamie says that reading bores him to death and that he has never read a book from cover to cover. He prefers things which are touchy-feely — like his superb cooking.

Mark the best choice

1. What can be learnt about dyslexia from the first two paragraphs?
   a) It used to be seen as a physical problem.
   b) It could help people avoid lessons at school.
   c) It didn't stop people from becoming good writers.
   d) It was once treated more seriously than today.

2. In comparison with Richard Branson, Aisling Oman ______________.
   a) was finally cured
   b) got higher grades
   c) had an easier school life
   d) had better teachers

3. The British Dyslexia Association sees dyslexia as a ______________.
   a) symptom of physical ill health.
   b) mental difficulty in recognizing words.
   c) psychological disorder.
   d) difficulty in learning a foreign language.
4. Which sentence best summarizes the final paragraph?
   a) There may be some advantages to being a dyslexic.
   b) Doing things with their hands makes people feel better.
   c) Aisling and Jamie are two different types of dyslexics.
   d) Famous dyslexics are treated better than ordinary people.

5. In the text as a whole, which aspect of dyslexia is NOT discussed?
   a) what dyslexia is
   b) examples of individual cases
   c) where the word 'dyslexia' originally comes from
   d) effective cures

VOCABULARY SECTION
PART A. Fill each gap with the correct form of the word given at the end of that line.

Throughout my (1) __________________________ I wanted to be a writer when I grew up. However, I lacked (2)__________________________ in myself. Although I knew I had the technical ability and even the encouragement and approval of my parents, I was afraid that I had a serious (3)__________________________ that would be difficult to overcome. I didn’t have enough (4)__________________________.

PART B. Fill each gap with a suitable word from the box below. DO NOT CHANGE the form of the words. Use each word only ONCE. Be careful! There are more words than you need.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adequate</th>
<th>assumed</th>
<th>benefit</th>
<th>confronted</th>
<th>extent</th>
<th>enrolment</th>
<th>efficient</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

In Tanzania, in order to eliminate gender imbalance at the College of Engineering and Technology, the Special Pre-Entry Program was launched in 2004, which immediately increased the percentage of female students to a great (1)__________________________ — 15.5% in the academic year 2004-2005, up from 7.3% in 2002-2003. In the academic year 2007-2008, 24.5% of students in engineering were female. The program achieved this increase in (2)__________________________ by allowing girls with low marks coming out of secondary school to undergo eight weeks of intensive, targeted training in engineering science, mathematics, chemistry and communication skills. While preparing the program, the members of the Gender Centre (3) __________________________ that some girls might under-perform at the secondary level because of the poor quality of education. The program, therefore, aimed to allow the girls to (4) __________________________ from quality education in the subjects most important for success in an engineering degree program. Not surprisingly, the girls in the first year were the ones who were (5) __________________________ with the greatest challenges. They stated that in their first year some of their male classmates and their teachers had negative reactions to their presence. However, by the second year, most of the negative reactions had stopped.
LOGICAL SEQUENCE
Circle the choice that best completes the following sentences.

1. Do men and women communicate differently? Is it possible that the ways men and women communicate can actually cause difficulty in understanding one another? The answer to both questions is yes, but if you learn to read signs and personalities, you don't get disappointed. The gender differences don't have to pose a problem. On the contrary, ________.
   a) they can add spice and excitement to a growing relationship
   b) the man is talking facts while the woman is talking emotions
   c) the two cannot understand each other because they're basically talking apples and oranges.
   d) men and women have distinct variations in the sending of messages by body language

2. Each year, millions of people go abroad to work, study, or travel. It's a great way to find out what life is like in another part of the world! You're probably hoping to make new friends and learn about the culture in your host country—everything from attitudes and beliefs to social customs and popular foods. However, __________.
   a) during the first few weeks most individuals are fascinated by the new
   b) constantly having to deal with new situations can be frustrating, even stressful
   c) homesickness, stress, fear, and confusion are all symptoms of culture shock
   d) talking to someone familiar to you always makes you feel better

3. People who can perform mental activities which everyone else would find completely impossible are called savants. There are only about 25 savants alive in the world today. They can all do certain amazing things with tremendous ease. For instance, __________.
   a) scientists believe that we all have amazing talents hidden deep inside our brains
   b) they are incapable of doing things which we would describe as normal
   c) one of them can multiply together two 10-digit numbers in half a second
   d) some of them cannot even communicate in a normal way with other people