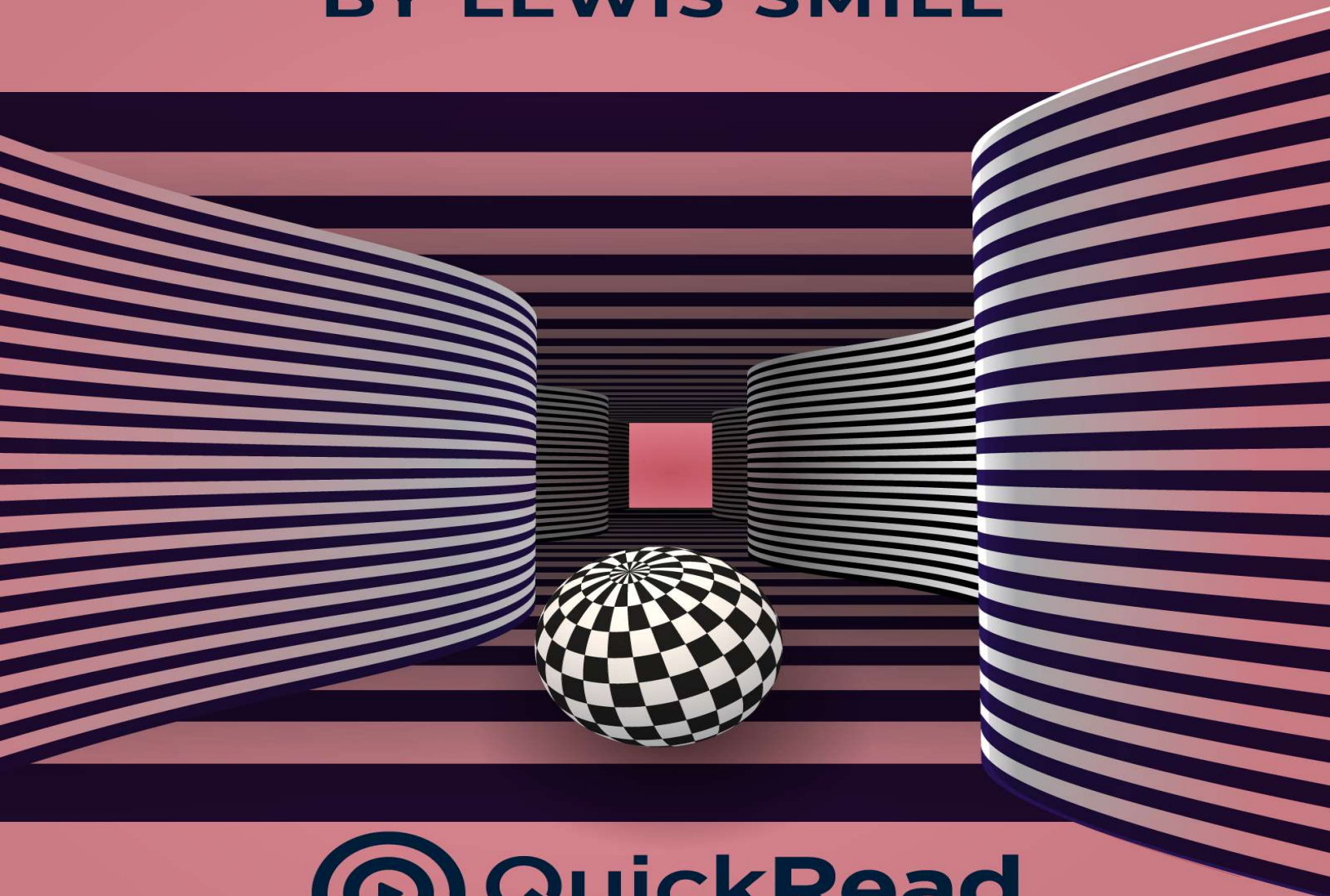


# SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

# THE MEMORY PALACE

BY LEWIS SMILE



# **Summary of The Memory Palace by Lewis Smile**

**Written by Alyssa Burnette**

Create a mental memory palace to improve your  
memory.

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# Introduction

You know that feeling you get when you can't quite remember something? You know you've forgotten something and you know you should be able to remember it... you just can't put your finger on what that specific thing is. In moments like that, it would be so helpful if your brain had a filing cabinet of memories. Then you could simply open up the right folder of memories and discover exactly what you forgot! Well, that's where the memory palace comes in. If you've ever heard Sherlock reference his "mind palace" in the popular TV show, then you already know what we're talking about. And over the course of this summary, you'll learn how to make a mind palace of your own!



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## Exercise Your Memory

If you're an avid gym goer, then you probably set aside dedicated days to focus on certain parts of your body. For example, one day might be "leg day." Another day, you might work on your core. But do you ever set aside a day to exercise your mind? Most of us wouldn't dream of doing such a thing. In fact, we probably feel that our minds get a daily workout whether we like it or not! As kids, for example, we spent countless hours in school and poring over our homework, filling our brains with an endless litany of facts and figures. Likewise, as adults, we waste a lot of our brain power on to-do lists and other mundane, meaningless things that have little impact on our lives in the long run. As a result, we're often happy when these things leave our memory and we frequently find ourselves so exhausted that we just don't want to think any more! It's easier to give our brains a break and simply zone out with Netflix.

But the author observes that all of these activities are actually detrimental to our memories! Filling our brains with things we don't want to learn isn't the same as devoting a special workout for our memory. Because your heart isn't in what you're studying, your study session is unlikely to strengthen your memory; you'll likely remember just enough to pass the test and forget it all immediately after. So in this case, it's plain to see that this isn't the same as "training your brain." Similarly, when we zone out in front of the TV, we're cultivating lazy brains and allowing our minds to wander all over the place! So, when we spend most of our time engaged in these two types of mental activities, it's no wonder that we struggle to remember things! But of course, that's not to say that we shouldn't take some time to relax and it doesn't mean that our brains should be under constant pressure. Instead, the author is advocating for a more nuanced type of memory training.

So, what does memory training look like? To help you visualize his technique, the author suggests that you consider the things that are most helpful to your recall. As a general rule, you're most likely to remember something when you can connect it to a place, name, or thing. For example, let's say you're trying

to remember where you left your keys. As you mentally retrace your steps, the last thing you remember was that you were walking past a lake. From there, you might pause to think about how beautiful the lake was, or the sun sparkling on the water... and then it hits you that you walked home, hung your coat on your coat rack, and left your keys in your coat pocket! It can also help if you associate a memory with something that makes you laugh! Everybody tends to remember funny things.

So, the next time you're trying to remember something important, the author suggests that you construct a mental picture for that thing that will help you remember. For example, if you're trying to remember the names of the people involved with the first Thanksgiving for a history test, you could connect those names to a vivid memory of something you like. For example, in my case, Thanksgiving always makes me think of pumpkin spice and I love pumpkin spice lattes from Dunkin Donuts. So, every time I think about pumpkin spice lattes, I could remember "Pocahontas, Chief Massasoit, William Bradford..." Just remember to make your example memorable enough for it to really stick! So, try to choose something you really love, something you really hate, or something so shocking that it will stick in your head!



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# What is Your Spatial Memory?

In the first chapter, we examined a brief overview of our relationship with memory and some helpful memory tricks that we can use. But now we're going to take a look at an aspect of our memories that you may be less familiar with: spatial memory. Spatial memory is simply defined as your personal record of information about the space around you. That sounds like an oversimplification, so we're going to explore that in a little more detail. In practice, your spatial memory is the reason why you know where the light switches in your house are even when it's dark and you're half-asleep. It's how you know where the creaky floorboards in your house are and why you could drive your daily route with your eyes closed. Your spatial memory is also why you retain memories from places you haven't visited in years, especially your old childhood home or town.

But as cool as this is, sometimes we find it frustrating. We've grown so used to this instinctive reflex that we often take it for granted and wonder why our brains waste space on this information when we really need to remember that co-worker's name or the dates for tomorrow's history test. However, the author observes that our spatial memory is more vital than we think! Although we frequently take it for granted, the truth is that we would quite literally be lost without it. If we didn't have our spatial memory, we would struggle to remember the basic navigational principles that help us stay on top of our daily lives. For example, imagine what your life would be like if, instead of forgetting the name of the person you just met, you regularly forgot how to get home from work! Sure, we could always plug our address into the Maps app, but how scary would it be if you often felt lost on your way to and from familiar places? What if you lacked the ability to remember where you had been before?

All of these freaky options would be on the table without our spatial memory, so if we had to choose what we're more likely to forget, it's probably easier to struggle with little things like names and dates! So, that's why our spatial memory is an awesome and essential part of our lives. But the good news is



that our relationship with spatial memory doesn't have to be an either/or situation! In fact, we can train our spatial memory to help with our overall recall! And in the next chapter, we'll explore a few tips for doing so.



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# Build Your Memory Palace

Remember how, in the first chapter, we mentioned that connecting images and places is a helpful mnemonic device? (If you didn't remember, don't worry! That's what this book is for!) Well, in this chapter, we're going to look at that concept in a little more detail. Thinking about things you love-- like pumpkin spice lattes-- is one helpful tool, but another great trick is to literally construct a place in your mind so that you can turn it into your very own memory palace. But how does that really work? Well, for starters, it doesn't have to be a specific place or even a literal palace. (You don't have to have the mansion from Downton Abbey in your head if that isn't your thing!) Instead, your mental memory palace can simply be a place or a route with which you're very familiar.

You can think of the memory palace we'll create as a sort of "information super highway." This memory palace will contain all the important stuff you'll need to remember so you can visualize it in whichever way works best for you. If you think about it like a house, you can envision yourself stopping at each room along the way. Or you can think about it as a route and imagine your daily commute to work or school. You can then add stops or street names along the way to serve as memory mile markers. And that's where the crazy story comes in! You might remember that, in the first chapter, we discussed the importance of telling yourself a crazy story to help you retain information. And in this chapter, we'll take a closer look at how that will function in practice.

For example, let's imagine that you're trying to memorize some facts about *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens for a test. But unfortunately, the story is a little long and... well... bleak! With over 1000 pages of verbose and antiquated language, how can you ever commit it all to memory? The author recommends that you start by taking select details that stand out to you and connecting them to a crazy story that will draw on your spatial memory. For example, if we use the analogy of connecting facts to your daily commute you might imagine that you're on your way to Dunkin Donuts to grab your

morning coffee before school. But instead of the customary orange and pink of your traditional Dunkin Donuts, the building is instead a large, gloomy looking mansion! (You can envision this house as the essence of Halloween on steroids-- bats, creepy music, the works!) And that's how you remember *Bleak House*.

As you collect your bleak cup of coffee and drive on, you pass one of the standard landmarks that you use as a guiding point during your commute. But instead of the building you're used to, you see an old, decaying courthouse with an endless litany of sad people drudging in and out of it. Inside, you can hear the slam of a judge's gavel and the opening remarks made by an important-sounding lawyer with a British accent. And that's how you remember *Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce*, the landmark court case that lies at the heart of *Bleak House*. These are just a few examples but you can easily see what they mean. Whatever you're trying to remember, the point is to tap into your spatial memory. Because your spatial memory automatically registers locations that are significant to you and helps you remember them, associating information with a familiar physical place can hack your spatial memory and help you to remember other types of information as well. The key is simply to make that information wacky enough for it to stand out to you. (Case in point: imagining that your morning cup of coffee-- or "cup of Joe"--is being served to you by an impoverished and dirty boy named Joe can help you remember Poor Joe, one of the characters in *Bleak House*!)

But creating these wacky scenarios isn't enough. You also have to spend some time really imagining them and letting these images burn into your brain. A fleeting thought or visualization isn't enough; you have to really concentrate on seeing these images in your mind's eye. So, spend about 15 minutes each day envisioning these scenarios. Before you know it, you'll soon find that you're able to remember each of the names, dates, or facts you were trying to recall! This also ensures that your memory will act as a failsafe, trapping and retaining the information in a more effective way than an all-night study session. (Because, let's be honest, cramming never works!) And the best part is that you can reuse and recycle this trick as many times as you need it! Plus, its power isn't limited to tests or to vital information. You can apply this same

principle to help you remember anything from someone's name to where you parked. And once you put this principle into action, you'll discover that you can actually remember anything! All you have to do is construct a memory palace.



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## Final Summary

Forgetting things is a natural part of the human experience. Despite our best intentions, we often forget everything from our shopping list to where we left our keys. And sadly, far too many people accept this as a fact of life, assuming that there's nothing anyone can do to change it. But the author argues that building a mental memory palace can help you to remember anything and everything! Just start by constructing a crazy story and associating information with a physical place or a route you take every day. Doing so will connect information to your spatial memory and enable you to instinctively retain information in the same way that your mind absorbs the spatial details you need to know every day.



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