

Study Logs for Self-Regulated Vocabulary Learning

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Self-regulated learning (SRL) involves being in control and autonomous in one's learning (Zimmerman, 1990). Self-regulated learners are able to engage in metalinguistic processes that allow them to complete target tasks and develop their linguistic competence. This action research project focused on 2nd-year junior high school students learning English in Japan. Over a period of 8 months during the school year, they were asked to keep a study log of their learning of English vocabulary words. Findings show that the study log activity decreased students' anxiety regarding vocabulary learning to some extent. In addition, they were able to enhance their metacognitive skills of self-efficacy, self-management, and self-control, which are key factors in SRL. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that study logs can assist teachers in fostering self-regulated learners at the junior high school level.

自己調整学習 (SRL) とは、学習者が自身の学習を管理し、自律的に学習に取り組むことである (Zimmerman, 1990)。言語学習において、自己調整学習が身につけている学習者はメタ言語能力を用いて目標課題を完成させ、言語能力を向上させることができる。本実践的研究では、英語を学ぶ日本の中学 2 年生に焦点を当て、8ヶ月間語彙学習の記録をつけさせた。その結果、学習記録活動は、生徒の語彙学習に対する不安を和らげ、自己効力感、自己管理、自制心 (セルフコントロール) に対するメタ認知的技能を高めた。これにより、学習記録は中学生の自己調整学習を促す手助けになりうると結論づける。

For beginning learners of English, especially in an EFL setting, being enthusiastically engaged with one's own learning is an essential element. In an environment where the target language is not easily accessible in daily life, one needs to focus attention on what aspects of language need to be learned and how to learn them. The metacognitive process learners undergo to monitor, reflect, and evaluate themselves is called self-regulated learning (SRL; Zimmerman, 1990). In this paper we describe an action research project designed to investigate the efficacy of study logs in activating SRL among junior high school students in Japan. We looked closely at the study logs students maintained while preparing for vocabulary quizzes during 8 months of a school year so as to further understand these metacognitive processes.

Self-Regulated Vocabulary Learning

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is the process of autonomous control and evaluation of academic learning by students (see Zimmerman, 1990, for an overview). Self-regulated learners are proactive in finding ways to achieve their goals when acquiring new knowledge. They engage in metacognitive processes that allow them to set goals, monitor their learning and reflect on it at different stages, and self-evaluate their overall progress. It is beneficial for learners to be in control of their learning, as this encourages further development.

Mizumoto and Takeuchi (2008) argued that generating a self-regulated learning cycle among learners enhances learning efficacy and self-confidence. Essentially, self-regulated learners tend to have high self-esteem and motivation for learning and as a result tend to learn more effectively. In their study, Tseng, Dörnyei, and Schmitt (2006) focused on self-regulated vocabulary learning. They assessed self-regulated learners engaged in strategic vocabulary learning in comparison with learners who were not self-regulated. Based on their findings, they proposed that the self-regulated learners went through three distinct phases that optimized their vocabulary learning. These phases can be visualized as a continuous loop as shown in Figure 1.

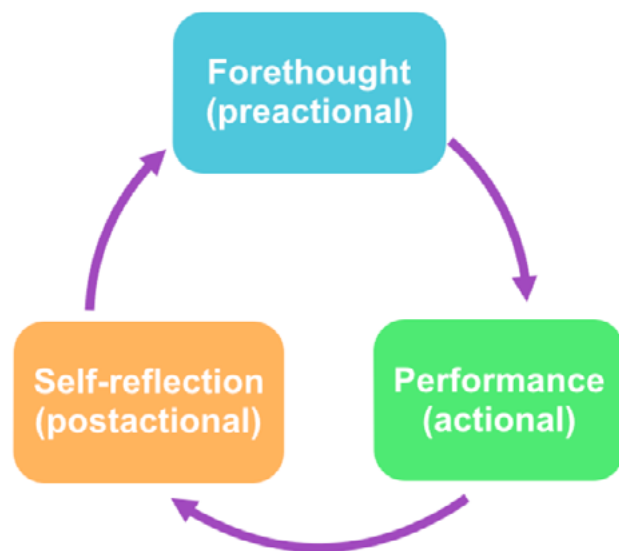


Figure 1. Three phases of self-regulation (adapted from Tseng, Dörnyei, & Schmitt, 2006).

The first phase of SRL is forethought, also described as the preactional phase due to the fact that it takes place before any actual learning happens. In the preactional phase, learners consider and plan the steps to achieve learning goals, as well as evaluate their current level of skill and proficiency, so as to create a base point to launch from. In the next phase, performance (actional), learners engage in actual learning based on the plans laid out in the preactional phase. Finally, in the self-reflection (postactional) phase, learners reflect on their learning, evaluate their progress, and use this self-reflection to modify and fine-tune the rest of the process to achieve full skill/knowledge acquisition. This continuous cycle not only leads to language learning but is also a skill in its own right. Tseng, Dörnyei, and Schmitt (2006) concluded that “the essential aspect of empowering learners is to set into motion the self-regulatory process rather than to offer the instruction of a set of strategies” (p. 95).

In our project, learner study logs were implemented so as to support and monitor junior high school students’ metacognitive processes while they were preparing for vocabulary quizzes. Through the study log activity, we were able to see students’ processes

of planning and reflecting so as to prepare themselves for the quizzes, leading to self-regulation.

Research Questions

At the school where we conducted this project, students were assigned a vocabulary book and asked to write English translations of Japanese words from pages selected by their teacher each week. No explicit instructions were given in class on possible strategies for studying words in preparation for quizzes. It was up to the students to develop their own methods of preparation. The aim of the project was to investigate whether giving students a chance to think metalinguistically would lead to higher confidence and better performance on the quizzes. Study logs were used to record target scores, learning plans, actual quiz scores, self-evaluations of learning progress, quiz achievement, and reflective comments.

The research questions we addressed in this project were the following:

- RQ1. Were study logs effective in promoting junior high school students’ self-regulated learning?
- RQ2. What do study logs tell us about students’ metacognitive processes and/or development?

RQ1 was addressed by analyzing the questionnaire on students’ attitudes toward learning English, quiz scores, and target quiz scores recorded in study logs. RQ2 was addressed by examining the comments in study logs. Specifically, we looked for frequently recurring words that described their metacognitive processes.

Classroom Implementation

Fifty-two students in their 2nd year of junior high school at a private school in Saitama Prefecture took part in the project. One of us presented all the materials and daily lessons.

The materials used were as follows:

- an English vocabulary book (Chugaku Kyouiku Kenkyukai, 2010) chosen by the school;
- a series of 40-item and 100-item quizzes that required students to translate Japanese words into English words from the assigned vocabulary book;

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- a study log to plan and record reflections in Japanese before and after the vocabulary quizzes and in-class discussions on vocabulary learning strategies; and
- a questionnaire (adapted from Collett, 2011; Mizumoto, 2011; Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2008; Tanaka & Maeda, 2004) using a 1-4 Likert scale (see Appendix A).

The English vocabulary book used at this school was chosen by the teachers in the English department and was used in the 1st and 2nd years of junior high school as an introductory text for learning English words. It only included words designated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology of Japan (MEXT).

The 40-item and 100-item quizzes were prepared by the authors. These consisted of items requiring students to translate Japanese words into English from the vocabulary book. The students had 8 minutes to complete each 40-item quiz and 15 minutes to complete each 100-item quiz. The students took 40-item quizzes once a week and 100-item quizzes every month. The quizzes were conducted as scheduled by the teacher from May through July and July through December.

The study logs had columns for students to write target scores, learning plans, and reflections about vocabulary learning. The students were given their study logs in class a week before each quiz to write in their target score and prepare for the upcoming quiz. Promptly after each quiz, the students were asked to assess their learning progress and quiz achievement on a scale of 1 to 4 with 4 being the most positive. They also wrote out their reflections in preparing for the quiz as well as comments about their performance on it. The aim of this activity was to assist them with planning, monitoring, and analyzing their learning for the quizzes. The study logs were used by the students to put their study plan into words and keep track of it for the week. They were collected and kept by the teacher for the duration of the project (8 months).

During class, students shared ways of practicing new vocabulary in small groups and as a whole class. The teacher elicited responses from each group and wrote them on the blackboard so that all the students could see what their peers had said. Handouts on learning strategies were distributed after the class discussion (see Appendix B). These contained tips on when, how, and how long to study new vocabulary, as well as strategies shared by other students.

The study logs were passed out by the teacher after each quiz. On the day of the first quiz, the students were asked to reflect and write about how they had prepared for the quiz that day as well as plan for the next one.

Data Collection

After reviewing previous studies (Collett, 2011; Mizumoto, 2011; Mizumoto & Takeuchi, 2008; Tanaka & Maeda, 2004), we constructed a questionnaire of EFL learning strategies (see Appendix A) and administered it three times throughout the period of our project—in May, July, and December of 2014. The questionnaire was designed to collect data on students' language learning in respective categories. It consisted of 58 items in eight categories: self-efficacy, anxiety, input-seeking, imagery, writing rehearsal, oral rehearsal, association, self-management, self-control, self-evaluation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation. The results were analyzed to identify any subtle changes in students' attitudes towards studying English.

Excel for Windows was used in analyzing quantitative data from study logs and questionnaires. The results of the questionnaires were analyzed using *t* tests to find differences in students' responses. We referred to research methods used by Takeuchi and Mizumoto (2014) for analysis.

Results

Study Logs

Students' Comments

As noted earlier, the study logs included a column for students to write out reflections in preparing for quizzes and a column for writing comments about their performance on them. In the planning column of the study logs, students commented on how they managed their learning and strategies they used to overcome mistakes. For example, strategies that aimed at overcoming mistakes included "checking pronunciation when spelling," "thinking about the meaning when practicing," "practicing words that were difficult first," and "repeatedly quizzing myself to practice words." (All comments have been translated into English by the authors.) Comments on how they managed their learning included "I will find more time to study" and "I will check my study schedule to be more prepared for the next quiz."

The students' comments made in the reflection column included analysis of mistakes, completion, and evaluation. Below are examples of comments students made in each category.

- Analysis of mistakes: "I did not remember the meaning of the words," "I made a spelling mistake," "I made a small mistake," "I made the same mistakes words," "I confused R and L."

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- Completion of the plan: “I was able to study according to my plan,” “I was not able to study according to my plan.”
- Evaluation of results: “I was able to score higher than last time,” “I was able to write the words correctly,” “I was able to reach my target score,” “I was not able to write the words correctly,” “I did not study much,” “I was not able to reach my target score.”

From these comments, we were able to get a sense of students’ metacognitive processes while planning for or reflecting on quizzes. The students were clearly thinking strategically about how they could study better and set goals to improve their quiz scores. Furthermore, we were able to see students’ reflections on why they were not able to practice enough for the quiz to reach their target score.

Correlation of Self-Evaluation of Learning Progress With Scores

Correlations were calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficient, where $\pm.70-1.0$ was considered highly correlated and $\pm.40-.70$ was considered moderately correlated (Takeuchi & Mizumoto, 2014). Because there were several students who did not record either a target score, an actual score, or a self-evaluation, the student number (*n*) for each combination varies.

First, we looked at the correlation of the students’ self-evaluation of learning progress with (a) the target score they set, (b) the actual score they got, and (c) the gap between the target score and the actual score. Table 1 displays the number of students who achieved correlations in each combination. Out of 47 students, two students’ self-evaluations correlated positively with their target scores, but five correlated negatively. Out of 48, 13 students’ self-evaluations correlated positively with their actual scores, whereas one correlated negatively. Out of 48 students, 14 students’ self-evaluations correlated positively with the gap between their target and actual scores, but one correlated negatively.

Table 1. Correlation of Self-Evaluation of Learning Progress, Target Score, and Actual Score

Correlation	Target score (<i>n</i> = 47) n (%)		Actual score (<i>n</i> = 48) n (%)		Gap bet. target and actual scores (<i>n</i> = 48) n (%)	
	positive	negative	positive	negative	positive	negative
Highly (<i>r</i> = $\pm.70-1.0$)	0 (0.0)	1 (1.9)	2 (3.8)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
Moderately (<i>r</i> = $\pm.40-.70$)	2 (3.8)	4 (7.5)	11 (20.8)	1 (1.9)	14 (26.4)	1 (1.9)

Second, we looked at the correlation between students’ self-evaluations of their learning progress and their quiz scores (see Table 2). Correlations were calculated using the Pearson correlation coefficient and the same ranges stated above were adopted. Out of 46 students, 35 students’ self-evaluations of learning progress correlated positively with that of quiz achievement.

Table 2. Correlation of Self-Evaluation of Learning Progress and Quiz Score (*n* = 46)

Correlation	positive n (%)	negative n (%)
Highly (<i>r</i> = $\pm.70-1.0$)	19 (41.3)	0 (0.0)
Moderately (<i>r</i> = $\pm.40-.70$)	16 (34.8)	0 (0.0)

Questionnaire

As stated above, the students answered the questionnaire three times: May, July, and December. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to compare answers to questionnaire items at different times. Correlation coefficient $\pm.70-1.0$ was considered highly correlated and $\pm.40-.70$ was considered moderately correlated.

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We compared the questionnaire data three times: May and July, July and December, and May and December. The results are shown in Table 3. When the questionnaire data for May and July were compared, there was a significant difference on one item in self-management. In the comparison of May and December, there were differences on items in self-efficacy, anxiety, self-management, and self-control (note that in terms of anxiety, the analysis indicated negative significance, which means the students reported a decrease in anxiety). There were no other significant differences.

Table 3. Items with Significant Correlation Differences

Comparison	Category	Item (number / statement)
May – July	Self-management	36* I try to make it a rule to remember a certain number of words.
May – December	Self-efficacy	5* I can practice my own way of studying vocabulary and remember it.
	Anxiety	10** When I try to remember vocabulary, I feel anxious about my failure of remember it. (negative correlation)
	Anxiety	13* I feel gloomy when I have to study for a vocabulary test given in class. (negative correlation)
	Self-management	39* I consciously take time studying vocabulary in order to prepare for tests such as Eiken or mock tests.
	Self-control	41* When studying vocabulary, I use my own way to accomplish what I plan to study.

* = $p > .05$; ** = $p > .01$

Discussion

Regarding what the study logs revealed about students' metacognitive processes, it can be said that students were able to follow the forethought and self-reflection phases of the three phases of SRL. In answer to RQ1, it seems that study logs were effective in promoting junior high school students' self-regulated learning. The results from the questionnaire show significant differences on items in self-management and self-control.

Furthermore, the decrease in anxiety can be interpreted as students gaining positive attitudes toward vocabulary learning, possibly as a result of keeping a study log. One thing to note is that quantitative data from study logs concerning students' self-evaluation of learning progress revealed that almost one fourth of the students evaluated their learning progress based on their actual score and the gap between the target score and their actual score. That is to say, it seems there was a tendency for the students' self-evaluation of their learning progress to be influenced by how well they scored on the quiz.

From reviewing the comments in the study logs, we were able to find comments relating to students' processes of planning and reflecting on their learning of new vocabulary. This answered RQ2: What do study logs tell us about students' metacognitive processes and/or development? The comments in study logs showed that students were able to manage their learning and construct strategies to overcome mistakes they made on quizzes. They commented that they would find more time to study and plan in advance to be better prepared for the next quiz.

Although the results of this research are not generalizable and must be interpreted with caution because these were intact classes, the statistical results of the questionnaire suggested a tendency toward decreases in learning anxiety, along with greater self-efficacy, self-management, and self-control. From these findings, we can say that using study logs seems to be an effective way of encouraging self-regulated learning in junior high school students, especially in the self-reflection phase and forethought phase. This affirmatively answered our first research question. That is, the study logs appeared to help the students become more confident about studying vocabulary based on their own learning strategies as well as carrying out their own learning plans.

However, it needs to be pointed out that the students' comments were rather brief and that some students wrote the same comments repeatedly. Therefore, for more concrete results, we would need more detailed qualitative data on what strategies the students used and how they actually employed the strategies they claimed to use in the study logs. A more in-depth investigation could be conducted by interviewing students and having them explain what they wanted to convey in their comments. In addition, further research is necessary to investigate to what extent the use of study logs can facilitate students' actual vocabulary acquisition in terms of meaning and spelling.

Conclusion

This action research project looked at how the use of study logs can enhance junior high school students' SRL processes in learning English vocabulary. The results showed that the use of study logs was effective to a certain extent in decreasing the students' anxi-

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ety regarding vocabulary learning and enhancing their metacognitive skills, especially self-recognition of the development of self-efficacy, self-management, and self-control, which are key elements in SRL. The study that we carried out is exploratory in that there were a limited number of students and the study was conducted with intact classes. Nevertheless, it provides insight into how SRL can be adapted in a junior high school setting. We predict that fostering metacognitive skills through the study log activity can assist young learners to become more autonomous in their learning and acquisition. Nurturing self-regulated learners is important in order to make learning a continuing process for the individuals involved.

Bio Data

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Appendix A

Student Questionnaire About English and Learning English Vocabulary

Please circle your opinion on a scale of 4 to 1.

- 4- strongly agree
- 3- agree
- 2- disagree
- 1- strongly disagree

Your answers to the questionnaire will not affect your grades or evaluation.

Self-efficacy

1. I memorize vocabulary easily.
2. I know more words than other people in my class.
3. I easily remember the words I've studied.
4. I think I will get an adequate score on the next test.
5. I use my own method to study vocabulary.
6. My study methods are effective for remembering vocabulary
7. I retain the words I memorize.
8. Learning vocabulary is not difficult for me.
9. I think I study vocabulary more effectively than other people.

Anxiety

10. When I try to memorize vocabulary, I feel anxious about forgetting it.
11. I find learning English vocabulary tiresome.

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12. I feel anxious that my English vocabulary level will prevent me from getting a good score on tests.
13. I feel depressed when I have to study for a vocabulary test given in class.
14. I sometimes worry if my way of studying vocabulary is effective.
15. I feel that I will forget the words I study despite studying for long periods of time.

Input-seeking

16. I try to expose myself to English vocabulary by reading or listening a lot.
17. I try to create the perfect learning environment for myself.
18. I try to make use of the media (TV, radio, the Internet, and movies) to learn vocabulary.
19. I study vocabulary with the intention of using it.

Imagery

20. When I try to memorize vocabulary, I mentally associate the word with a picture.
21. When I try to memorize vocabulary, I relate my personal experiences to it.
22. When I try to memorize vocabulary, I make an image of the orthographic form.
23. When I try to memorize vocabulary, I use the keyword method (keyword mnemonic technique).
24. When I try to memorize vocabulary, I think about whether the meaning of the word is negative or positive.

Writing-rehearsal

25. When I try to memorize a vocabulary word, I write it repeatedly.
26. When I try to memorize a vocabulary word, I write it on a note or a card.
27. When I try to memorize a vocabulary word, I memorize not only the meaning but also the spelling of the word by writing it.

Oral-rehearsal

28. When I try to memorize a vocabulary word, I vocalize to memorize not only the meaning but also the pronunciation of the word.

29. When I try to memorize a vocabulary word, I say the sample sentence aloud.

Association

30. When I try to memorize a vocabulary word, I associate the synonyms (e.g., begin and start) or antonyms (e.g., positive and negative) I already know.
31. When I try to memorize a vocabulary word, I also memorize the synonyms or antonyms of the word.
32. When I try to memorize a vocabulary word, I memorize similar words (in meaning, sound, or shape) or related words in a group.

Self-management

33. I regularly review the vocabulary I have learned to check if I remember it.
34. I keep a vocabulary book or word list to check the vocabulary anytime.
35. I try to make it a rule to memorize a certain number of words per day.
36. I try to learn other vocabulary than what I was taught in class.
37. I try to take time specifically for studying vocabulary.
38. I consciously take time to study vocabulary in order to prepare for tests (such as Eiken or mock tests).
39. I use my own way of memorizing, checking, and reviewing vocabulary.

Self-control

40. When memorizing vocabulary, I use my own study plan.
41. When trying to memorize vocabulary, I use certain strategies to maintain my concentration.
42. When memorizing vocabulary, I use my own way to make it as interesting as possible.
43. When memorizing English, I try not to procrastinate.
44. I think my way of preventing procrastination is effective.
45. When studying vocabulary, I usually finish what I plan to study faster than expected.
46. I carry out my study plan (e.g., remember a certain number of words) no matter how hard it is to accomplish.

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47. When studying vocabulary, I'm sure I can finish it no matter how boring it is.

Self-evaluation

48. I have experienced effective vocabulary learning, using my own methods.

Extrinsic Motivation

I study English ...

49. because I need to get a good score or enter high school.

50. in order to get a prestigious job in the future.

51. in order to get a better salary later on.

Intrinsic Motivation

I study English ...

52. for the pleasure I feel when surpassing myself in my English studies.

53. for the enjoyment of personal development through language learning.

54. for the enjoyment of understanding the meaning of words, after lengthy study.

55. for the satisfaction I feel when I can complete difficult drills in English.

56. for the elation I feel when understanding spoken English.

57. for the elation I feel while speaking English, and having others understand what I am saying.

Appendix B

Hints on How to Study New Vocabulary

Studying vocabulary can be boring. Here are some tips on how to make it a bit easier.

Frequency

Can you remember what you had for dinner last night? If you recall, "steak" at least once a day, you could probably remember it for a month. The key to remembering something is not to leave a long period between recalling things. The more frequently you recall something, the quicker it will become a part of your core vocabulary. Also, "practicing 15 minutes once a day" is different from "practicing 5 minutes, 3 times a day." Use your time wisely and focus even when you have little time.

Choosing which words to practice.

Do you think it's more efficient to practice all the words on the test at the same time, or focusing on ones you are least familiar with? It's probably more effective to practice the words you are not familiar with. Use your study time efficiently. Why don't you try writing all the words looking at the Japanese meanings first? Or course it's perfectly okay to test yourself and write all the words, too.

How to memorize new words.

How people memorize new words differs for each person. Some may be visual learners; others may be more attuned to kinesthetic or auditory methods. It's the same for learning new vocabulary. Find the strategy that fits you. No two people learn the same way. The important point is to be conscious of what you are learning.

A more efficient way of learning new vocabulary

Make it a goal to practice new words at least 15 minutes a day. There are days when you're busy with afterschool activities or you want to relax. Just make it a small part of your daily routine so you can keep on with it every day. It is also important to be as specific and detailed as possible with your study plan. By doing this, you need to actually imagine yourself studying, so can find the errors before you start. If something doesn't work, make changes to fit your own pace and preferred style.

Example plan

- When? How long?
- Weekdays, practice 5 minutes in the morning, 10 minutes after school, 15 minutes before going to bed.
- Which words? How many times?
- Practice writing 20 new words 5 times each, write 20 words you already know 1 time each.
- How?
- Say and write the words, make visual notes of the meaning of the words.

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Ideas for practicing new words.

1. When? How?

- on the way to school
- before morning study time
- during 10 minute breaks
- on the way home from school
- at home

2. Which words?

- all the words for the test
- mainly the words that are unfamiliar, review the ones that are familiar
- just the words that are unfamiliar
- the words that are especially hard to remember

3. How many times?

- continue writing until I memorize them
- set a time and write repeatedly
- make a goal of how many times
- by feeling (stop when I get tired of practicing)

4. Different strategies of memorizing new words.

Vocalize

- pronounce the words as you write them
- read the example sentence that goes with the word

Visualize

- look at the word and visualize the meaning
- look at the word and imagine the word having a positive or negative meaning
- look at the word and visualize the spelling
- imagine using the word in a certain situation

Associate

- practice the words in the same category (i.e. food, tools)
- practice the words with similar meanings or with the opposite meanings
- practice the words with similar spelling and/or pronunciation
- associate the words with own experiences

Other

- use flash cards
- carry your word book or word list and practice when you have spare time
- make it a rule to remember a certain number of words every day
- test yourself before the real test