



Activity 1 - Forgetting Curve

Memory is one of the topics that has fascinated psychologists since the very early days of the discipline. The scientific study of this phenomenon dates back to the late 1800's, when Hermann Ebbinghaus pioneered the study of memory. Ebbinghaus was interested in understanding how our memory loses information as time goes by, and came up with a plan that was inconceivable at the time: run an experiment of mental processes. He managed to create a system that allowed a participant to learn pieces of information. These nuggets were stripped from any possible meaning that could help them being better remembered, which he named *trigrams*: nonsense monosyllabic words like *ruk*, *zol*, and *gev*. These trigrams were then rehearsed in random lists under very strictly controlled conditions until learned by heart. To avoid contaminating his experiment, he used the most reliable experimental subject he had at hand: himself. So he recited his lists once and again, trying to learn them independently, and then observing the effect of forgetting on number of syllables he could remember.

Following this simple but clever method, Dr. Ebbinghaus created the forgetting curve model, a description of the amount of information that can be remembered after a certain period of time. Moreover, he found out how this curve changes with successive reviews. This finding, which can be represented by a mathematical function, has been a key contribution to the study of memory, and its utility remains nowadays. Think about how and when you review your notes before an exam and you will understand why!

1. Rehearse the following list of words, in order, until you can remember them all:

BUTTER	TICKET
ARM	GRASS
CORNER	STONE
LETTER	BOOK
QUEEN	STICK

Try to repeat them several times until you are completely sure you can remember the whole list.



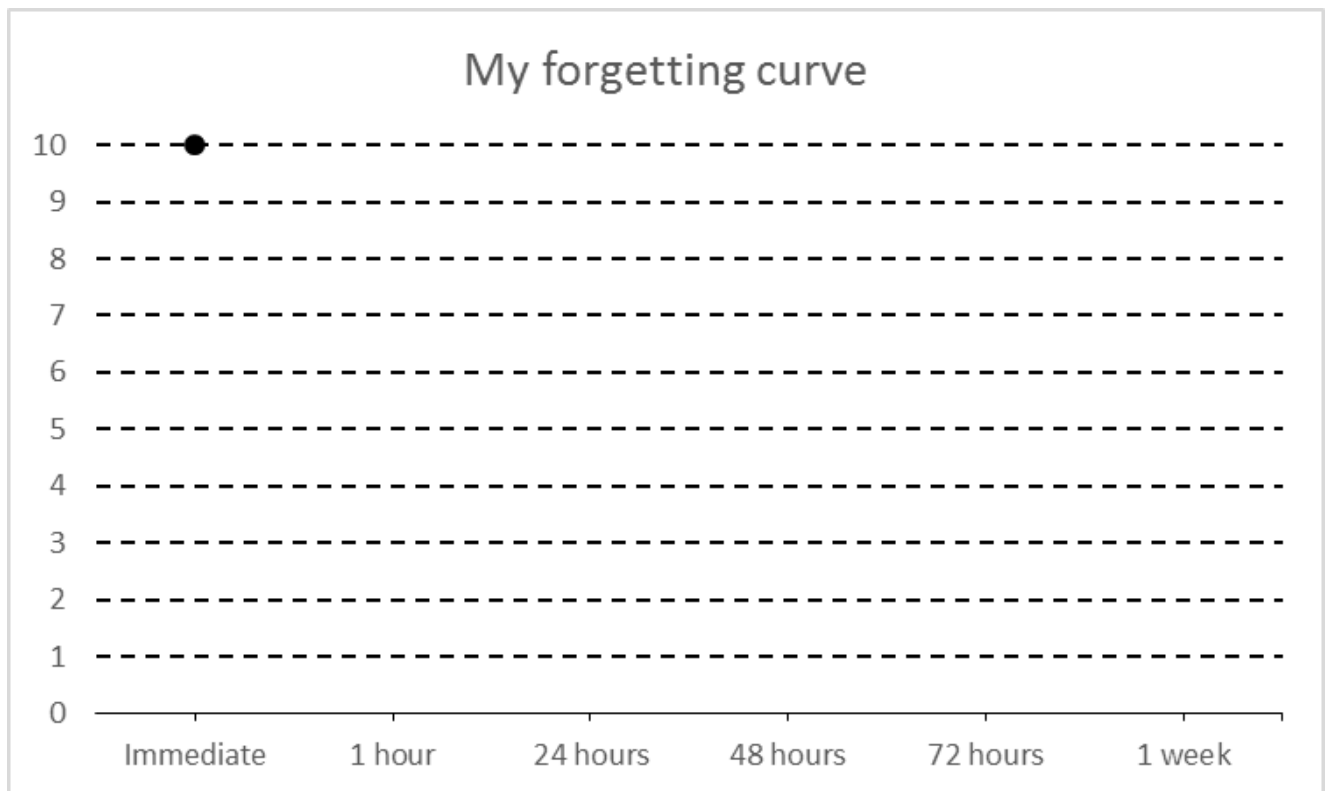
When you have learned the whole list, set some alarms or reminders in your calendar for:

- An hour later
- 24 hours later
- 48 hours later (2 days)
- 72 hours later (3 days)
- 1 week later

At each of these occasions, take a notebook and write down as many words from the list as you can remember. Don't check your answers yet!

When you have finished remembering the words after one week, check your responses, and write down the number of correct words you remembered each time.

Draw a point in a chart like the one below, indicating the number of correct words you remembered each time, and connect the dots with a line.



Congratulations! You have drawn your first forgetting curve!