

“But I’ve Got a Terrible Memory!”

How to Survive Greek Exegesis Quizzes

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Don’t worry. Take a deep breath and exhale slowly. You don’t have to be “good at languages” or have a “good memory” to do well in Greek. Anyone can memorize the amount of material you need to for our weekly quizzes if you are deliberate and consistent. Here are some tips based on observations about how memory works:

- 1. Spend a short time every day on review.** Long review sessions become almost useless in terms of retention after about half-an-hour. Try to set aside half-an-hour each day for reviewing your vocabulary and morphology: 15-minutes each. You’ll find that this is far more effective over the long run. The key is consistency. If you feel that you need more review time than this, don’t extend your review sessions any longer than half-an-hour. Instead, add a second review session at another time each day. A great time to do this review (though sometimes hazardous if you’re married) is at breakfast and dinner.
- 2. Use the Anki software to review your vocabulary.** What sets this software apart is that it remembers how frequently you get each word right and wrong. The software then brings up each word just when you need to review it. The better you know a word, the longer the software will wait until bringing it up for review again.
- 3. Make flash cards to review your morphology.** Use 3x5 cards (or create a new set of cards in Anki) to review your morphology paradigms. Writing out the card for each week’s new paradigms can be a part of your review process.
- 4. Don’t memorize more than you need to.** When you’re reviewing morphology, don’t try to memorize a full paradigm (a full word-form for each spot on the chart). Instead, just memorize the “signals” that will let you distinguish various forms for one another. If you’re not sure what these “signals” might be, look at Bill Mounce’s introductory grammar. He takes this approach.
- 5. Balance reviewing “new” material with refreshing previous weeks’ material.** Remember that the weekly quizzes are highly cumulative. If you emphasize each week’s new material too much, and forget the material reviewed in previous weeks, you will not do well (and you’re not really learning the language). For vocabulary, the Anki software does this for you, so you don’t need to think about it. For morphology review, try this: Each day review the week’s new paradigms, as well as three “old” paradigms from previous weeks. When you’ve reviewed one of the “old” paradigms, move it to the bottom of the “deck” and always take cards for review from the top of the deck. That way you will review each “old” paradigm every few days. If there are some paradigms that you find particularly difficult you may want to make a third “deck” for those cards and review them more frequently.
- 6. Use more of your senses.** People often try to memorize just by looking at flash cards. But the more senses we use when we review things, the better our retention. So when you look at a flash card, say the word and its gloss out loud. When you review a morphology pattern, say the pattern out loud, along with its title (“aorist passive,” etc.). Another sense to involve in the process is touch. Try using a scrap piece of paper to copy out each word and its gloss as you review your vocabulary. When you’re reviewing your morphology, instead of just saying each paradigm in your head (or, better, out-loud), write it out as you say it. The more senses you use, the more mental “clues” you’ll have to fall back on when you need to remember it. If you’re creative, you can even make up a tune to sing your morphology paradigms. Singing is usually a great way to memorize.
- 7. Be consistent.** Whatever you decide to do, DO IT EVERY DAY, NO EXCEPTIONS!!!

If you do all of this you will find you are able to memorize anything, with much better retention than you might have thought possible. The best part is that, for most people, it all takes 30-40 minutes a day!