

## **Thank You, Brain For All You Remember: What You Forgot Was My Fault** (Book Review)

### ***Reviewer:***

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### ***Textbook Details:***

Thank You, Brain For All You Remember: What You Forgot Was My Fault  
William R. Klemm  
Benecton Press  
9001 Grassbur Road, Bryan, Tx 77808, USA  
2004, ISBN 10930648-82-0  
9 chapters plus introduction and summary; 308 pages

This book claims to be aimed at anyone who wants to improve their memory but it might be better described as an aid for anyone wanting to improve their ability to learn. It is rather unusual in being much more than the average 'airport' bestseller which comprises merely memory tips for the lay reader hoping to improve themselves with very little outlay. The author attempts to find a middle way between the handy hints reader and the tome reporting on research findings aimed at other scientists. As such it fills an important gap in the market using both long established research findings and more recent studies to explain the functioning of the brain and justify the advice offered. The author is a Professor of Neuroscience at Texas A&M University and has been publishing research on brain function for more than 40 years. He has published many journal articles and a number of books. He states that the intended audience includes students, workers, senior citizens and 'anyone who wants to look smart'. I felt that the book was also suitable for teachers of all age groups who wish to provide some guidance to their students on how to learn and when and how to memorise. Not only does the author provide a practical guide for teachers but also a valuable resource for any reader's own learning. He successfully explains why we remember certain things, without appearing to make an effort, and yet cannot remember other, apparently, more important points.

Each chapter begins with a catchy, if somewhat gimmicky, title; a list of the main topics; a relevant quotation; and concludes with a tip list of key ideas. This format makes it easy to decipher the structure of the text and motivates one to dip in or look back for key points. While the book can be read from cover to cover I found myself jumping ahead to topics that appealed to me. In order to address this middle ground of advice for the lay person grounded in the research findings, the author adopts a style which varies from a casual, and often rather folksy, style which I found a little condescending to a more factual, descriptive style which he tended to use when reporting research findings. I personally preferred the latter style but maybe for the non-academic reader a relaxed style is more accessible. In addition the author sometimes references in an unconventional format. As an academic I found this a little irritating but my students have reported that they often find conventional referencing breaks up the text and interrupts their understanding of the flow of argument so I suspect that this approach may work well with the target audience.

Each chapter addresses a particular issue such as the need to pay attention, the value of sleep, the worries of memory loss associated with aging, the link between emotion and memory and the importance of association. By explaining the research which underpins the sort of the techniques that many of us already apply, such as the use of an acronym to remember the colours of the rainbow, Klemm helps us to make the necessary associations to understand and remember the key points. One useful distinction which he examines is the importance of registering information in the first place as opposed to the need to be able to recall that information. Thus we have to write the information to memory initially, and in order to do that, we have to pay attention and then we have to retrieve the information. He discusses a number of those tricky moments like the inability to remember the name of someone or the tip of the tongue experience and explains why we are more likely to recollect if we

stop consciously thinking about the word we are searching for. Another distinction which he uses, though he does not really explain it, is the separation of mind and brain. He suggests that we all have brains which are capable of being used to much better effect and it is the job of the mind to harness the brain and put it to good use. He also makes a distinction between implicit and explicit understanding and between conscious and unconscious thought.

The book is sometimes gripping and mostly accessible. It is full of simple examples that we can all relate to and some fascinating research findings are presented. The basis for the memory tricks that we see on television are explained. However, the author had a tendency at times to labour the point and the empirical work could have been described more succinctly. Some of the experiments are described in considerable detail and it was at this point that I found myself, as a lay reader, interested only in the conclusions that could be drawn; I wanted to skip to the chase so I often skimmed the detail. But it is an easy book to dip into and read out of sequence. The main point made by the book is that our brains can store and recall a great deal providing we understand how to use the brain effectively and apply appropriate techniques.

The one aspect that I felt was missing from the book was the presentation of a final model of memory which collated and related all the findings and presented them in a coherent fashion. Perhaps the most effective way for the learner/reader to make sense and then remember all the guides to effective learning and memorising is to produce their own diagram or model to summarise the points. This book aims to be different and to go beyond mere tricks and gimmicks to probe the scientific basis for good memory. I think it succeeds and is suitable for anyone who really wants to improve their memory by understand more clearly how it works. In an era where rapid change is the norm and societies have an aging demographic profile the challenge to us all is to continue to learn. This book reassures us that it is possible even for those among us who are aging.