

Diary of a memory champion

This is how he claims to boost his memory....

11:00am I've just woken up. This is because I was awake until four o'clock last night practising with playing cards.

The world championship is just five weeks away and I've still got to find a few improvements if I'm to retain my title comfortably.

11:14am First task of the day, as ever: read my emails. I get a mixture of enquiries from media organisations and requests for memory advice from individuals.

A Japanese TV company wants to film me at home in England and then in Japan later in the year. A fan from Indonesia is asking how he can improve his recall of names and faces. I receive a rejection from a top publisher just days after I turned down an offer from a lousy one!

11.39am While the computer is still on, I decide to practise the spoken number test. I program Java applets for my website and use them myself in training. A random decimal digit is heard every second. I have to sit there, committing each everything to memory, thereafter writing the entire number down correctly.

The best anyone in the world has done is 128. I am attempting 300 in order to really dominate that discipline. I end up making a single error – not too bad given there's still time to improve.

12.27pm Time to eat. When I'm at home, I always cook my own meals.

I've been a vegetarian for about fifteen years and I normally opt for something either Indian or Italian. I hardly go a day without eating a rice or pasta dish of some sort.

2:16pm I am contracted to do some promotional radio interviews on behalf of a telephone company that possesses one of the new directory enquiries numbers.

I have partly taken the work on as a challenge - I want to see if I can get their number into the public imagination by telling people how to remember it instead of hitting them over the head with the conventional advertising methods that the other companies are relying on – and hardly anyone can remember those numbers anyway!

4:26pm I book my flight to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, where the World Memory Championships are being held.

4:54pm I find some time to practise for the names and faces event in the world championship. We get fifteen minutes to look at a hundred full names and faces. Then, in recall, we see them again in a different order and without the names which we have to fill in underneath.

The task is easy enough for me; I will score about 8%. This is okay because we are not punished for errors in this one); but training for it is tricky as I have to find the names and faces to practise with. On this occasion I use a newspaper that shows about a hundred local council members. And it goes really well considering I haven't done this since last year's championship.

6:37pm I eat only lightly in the early evening because I don't want to be lethargic for one of the key parts of my training - hitting the road. Every night I make sure I run for at least a quarter of an hour - a jog interspersed with short sprints.

The hot spell has just come to an end here in England, so I'm all ready for the 38 degrees they have in Kuala Lumpur at the moment. I bet my rivals weren't out running in it, though!

Physical fitness won't help your memory on its own, but I need to sit and concentrate for hours in some disciplines, and surprisingly that is where this helps. Afterwards I lift some weights.

8:56pm I must sleep properly tonight. Disrupted sleep - especially jet lag - is the worst thing for damaging your memory performance. The championship is in Malaysia, so I will start adjusting to the different time zone long before I go out there. The competitions are over three days in October and they begin at about 2am UK time.

Before I turn in, I make mental notes of a few mundane things I have to remember to do tomorrow. I must work out roughly what I'm going to talk about when I do a Guardian interview. I need a new battery for my stopwatch – all the events are timed memorisations, so I always need to time what I'm doing.

