MEMORIZATION TECHNIQUES FOR CONSECUTIVE INTERPRETING

1. How do you remember? Are you a visual or a verbal learner, neither or both? If you forget something you have heard, try to understand what prevented you from storing or retrieving the information.

2. Your short-term memory (STM) capacity is normally limited to between five and nine bits of information, i.e. units of memory, and your ability to recall depends on how well you can organize what you have heard by finding patterns in what you hear. Have someone read a series of numbers to you. As soon as you are able to repeat seven unrelated numbers accurately, do the same thing but repeat the numbers backwards. You must be able to retain the whole series of seven numbers in your short-term memory in order to say them backwards.

3. Increase your analytical skills by reading a newspaper or magazine. After each story, try to summarize what you read in a single sentence. Do this in all your working languages.

4. Try this same exercise after listening to a news report or a radio or television talk show. Summarize the main idea in a single sentence.

5. Have someone record newspaper or magazine articles for you to use in the exercises below, or record talk or interview programs from the radio or television. Limit yourself to non-technical material. Do not record the news, because the newscaster reads from a prepared script. Record increasingly longer texts as your skills improve. You will only repeat the information you hear in the same language, not interpret it.

   A. Listen to the passage without taking notes and try to repeat as much as possible.

   B. Listen to the passage and take down key words to help you remember the content. Then repeat as much information as possible. Compare the results you achieved by taking notes with those without note-taking. Which worked best for you?

   C. Listen to the passage and try to repeat it verbatim with or without notes.

   D. Try condensing the passage into a few meaningful units, while keeping in mind that your STM can handle only between five and nine bits of information. Organize the information into groups, e.g. if a person were to list the schools she had attended and the subjects studied, you could group the schools by location and the subjects studied by topic. Numbers can be grouped the way people recite phone or social security numbers, in groups of two, three or four, rather than as a string of unrelated numbers. Please note that, when interpreting testimony, the speaker's word sequence should remain as spoken except to accommodate the syntax of the target language.

E. Do not allow your opinions to color your rendition of a speaker's words. The subject matter may be one about which you have strong opinions. Pay close attention to your reaction to the text while listening and maintain the same level of language (register) as the speaker.

Note that improving your listening and memory skill is an ongoing and life-long-endeavor. As you gain experience and confidence, your skills will increase.