Here’s my secret—I don’t really care if you remember many of these terms 2 years from now. If you remember enough to tell the basic story of US History it is OK by me. **What I do care about is that you learn HOW to study/learn.**

Study Strategy #1: **Chunking** AND **First and Last**

**CHUNKING:** There is research that the brain works by “chunking” or grouping large amounts of information into smaller pieces.

**So**…when you have a large amount of info to study, you benefit from breaking it into smaller sections. Focus on one chunk for several minutes, then switch to another chunk. Return to each chunk again. The small break from one subject to another gives your brain time to file away and organize the information.

**FIRST AND LAST:** There is research that suggests that when you study large amounts of material (like flashcards), you remember the ones you looked at first and last in the study session far better than the ones in the middle.

**So**…one strategy is to look at a chunk of flash cards and decide which items you know best. Put those items in the MIDDLE of your pile, and the ones you are less sure about at the start and end of the pile.

Study Strategy #2: **Categories**

**CATEGORIES:** As I said, when you are learning something, your brain works by putting ideas/information into categories unconsciously. One thing you can do to make this more efficient is to try to consciously create the categories yourself and put items in them.[[1]](#footnote-1)

So... when given 10 or 15 terms, you might look for 2-3 categories to put them in. In social studies, those might be things like: “positive events”, “challenges”, “controversial actions”, “ways of organizing”, “ideas”, “actions”, etc. Take your terms and see if most of them can fit in one category or the other. If they can, you are starting to see patterns in the terms/ideas. NOTE: for this to work, the categories have to make your brain work to make new connections. So, you can’t choose categories that are too obvious like “People” or “Places”.

If that is too difficult, another strategy is to pick 2-3 terms randomly and see if you can connect them. A few possibilities could be to ask yourself:

* Are these similar? If so, how?
* Are they different? If so, how?
* Did they lead to something else? What?
* Was this caused by something else? What?
* How would this history be different if this person/place/event didn’t exist?
1. This category building is called “developing a schema”. If you want to impress your parents, when you are studying, tell them you are trying to “develop a schema to connect the ideas from class in order to better understand them.” They will faint! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)