

Memory and mind

bear something in mind or keep something in mind

If you tell someone to **bear** something **in mind** or **keep** something **in mind**, you are reminding or warning them about something important which they should remember.

*There are a few general rules to **bear in mind** when selecting plants.*

***Keep in mind** that some places are more dangerous than others for women travelling alone.*

cross your mind

If something **crosses** your **mind**, you suddenly think of it.

*It **crossed my mind** that she might be lying about her age.*

food for thought

If something gives you **food for thought**, it makes you think very hard about an issue.

*This Italian trip gave us all much **food for thought**.*

a gut reaction

A **gut reaction** is a reaction that you have immediately and strongly, without thinking about something or being aware of your reasons.

[NOTE] The gut is the tube inside the body through which food passes while it is being digested.

*My immediate **gut reaction** was to never write again.*

lose the plot

If someone **loses the plot**, they become confused or crazy, or no longer know how to deal with a situation. [INFORMAL]

[NOTE] A plot is the sequence of events in a story.

*Vikram's working so many hours that he's **losing the plot** – he's making mistakes and keeps falling asleep on the job.*

miles away

If someone is **miles away**, they are completely unaware of what is happening or of what someone is saying, because they are thinking deeply about something else.

*You didn't hear a word I said, did you? You were **miles away**.*

a mind like a sieve

If you have a **mind like a sieve** or a **brain like a sieve**, you have a bad memory and often forget things.

*He's lost his keys again – he's got a **mind like a sieve**.*

[NOTE] You can use **brain** instead of **mind** and you can say **is like a sieve** instead of **have**.

*He lost his car keys but admitted that his **brain was like a sieve**.*

off the top of your head

If you say that you are commenting on something **off the top of your head**, you mean that what you are about to say is an immediate reaction and is not a carefully considered opinion, and so it might not be correct. [SPOKEN]

*I can't remember **off the top of my head** which plan they used, but it certainly wasn't this one.*

off your head

If you say that someone is **off** their **head** or **out** of their **head**, you mean that they are very strange, foolish, or dangerous. [BRITISH, INFORMAL]

*It's like working in a war zone. You must be **off your head** to live in that area.*

on the tip of your tongue

[1] If a remark or question is **on the tip of** your **tongue**, you want to say it, but stop yourself.

*It was **on the tip of my tongue** to tell him he'd have to ask Charlie. But I said nothing.*

[2] If something such as a word, answer, or name is **on the tip of** your **tongue**, you know it and can almost remember it, but not quite.

*I know this, no, no, don't tell me ... oh, it's **on the tip of my tongue**!*

out of your mind

[1] If you say that someone is **out of** their **mind**, you mean that they are crazy or stupid. [INFORMAL]

*You spent five hundred pounds on a jacket! Are you **out of your mind**?*

[1] If you are **out of** your **mind** with worry, grief, fear, etc., you are extremely worried, sad, afraid, etc.

*She's **out of her mind** with worry; her husband left the hotel yesterday and hasn't been seen since.*

[NOTE] You can also say that someone **is going out of** their **mind**.

*I was so sure that was what she said. Sometimes I wonder if I'm **going out of my mind**.*

*We have a lot of problems in our family. I'm **going out of my mind** with the worry of it all.*

rack your brain

If you **rack** your **brain**, you think very hard about something or try very hard to remember it.

*They asked me for fresh ideas, so I **racked my brain**, but couldn't come up with anything.*

[NOTE] You can also say **rack** your **brains**.

*Alma **racked her brains** for something to say.*

[NOTE] The old-fashioned spelling **wrack** is occasionally used instead of **rack** in this expression. *Bob was **wracking his brain**, trying to think where he had seen the man before.*

ring a bell

If something **rings a bell**, it is slightly familiar to you and you know you have heard it before, but you do not remember it fully.

*The name **rings a bell** but I can't think where I've heard it.*

Exercise 1

Complete the sentences with the words in the box. Some of the sentences have more than one answer.

head | mind | brain | thought | brains

- 1 Do you have the memory of an elephant or a _____ like a sieve?
- 2 You are mad. Totally, completely and utterly off your _____.
- 3 He was behaving as if he was out of his _____.
- 4 The previous chapters will already have given you plenty of food for _____.
- 5 Off the top of your _____, what do you know about Vitamin C?
- 6 Rack your _____ and tell me everything you now about him.

Exercise 2

Decide if the following sentences are true (T) or false (F).

- 1 If something crosses your mind, you forget about it. ☐
- 2 If something rings a bell, it reminds you of something. ☐
- 3 If you have a gut reaction to something, you have spent a long time thinking about it. ☐
- 4 If you say something off the top of your head, you are very strange and dangerous. ☐
- 5 If something is food for thought, it makes you think. ☐
- 6 If you are racking your brain, you aren't thinking very hard. ☐

Exercise 3

Choose the best answer to complete the sentences.

- 1 'Do you know anyone called Frascati?' – 'Well the name _____.'
a racks my brains b rings a bell c is miles away
- 2 'Dr Barth, what is the greatest single thought that ever _____?'
a rang a bell b racked your brains c crossed your mind
- 3 'You don't know anyone else who might be free?' – 'Not _____, no.'
a on the tip of my tongue b crossing my mind c off the top of my head
- 4 I'm just trying to remember his name; it's _____.
a racking my brains b on the tip of my tongue c crossing my mind
- 5 'Did you ask me a question? I'm sorry, I was _____.'
a miles away b out of my mind c ringing a bell
- 6 Someone mentioned this point recently and I'm _____ to think who it was.
a out of my mind b racking my brains c bearing it in mind

Exercise 4

Correct the idioms in these sentences.

- 1 Business has been very bad and the management seem to have **racked the plot**.
- 2 You can withdraw money at other banks but **bear in thought** that they might charge a handling fee.
- 3 You are **off your mind** if you think I'll help you commit a crime!
- 4 **Off the top of his mind**, he couldn't think of an excuse she would believe.
- 5 The after-dinner speaker provided us with plenty of **thought food**.
- 6 Her name was **on the top of my tongue**, but I just couldn't get it.
- 7 Personally, I trust my **gut action** to tell me when I'm right.
- 8 It **crossed my head** that I hadn't heard the children for a while.

Exercise 5

Choose the most appropriate thing A–H to say in each situation 1–8.

- 1 Someone gives you a useful tip for your next trip abroad. A It has crossed my mind.
- 2 You're telling someone about a thought-provoking talk you've just heard. B You're out of your mind!
- 3 A friend has just told you about an extreme sport he wants to try and you think it's too dangerous. C It's on the tip of my tongue.
- 4 You're trying hard to remember the answer to a quiz question. D The name rings a bell.
- 5 A friend has mentioned someone's name and asked you if you know that person. You aren't sure but the name sounds familiar. E Sorry, I was miles away.
- 6 You realize that you haven't been listening to something a friend has been telling you, because you were thinking about something else. F It's certainly given me food for thought.
- 7 You have to explain why you burst out laughing when you saw your photo in the paper. G Thanks, I'll keep it in mind.
- 8 Someone asks you if you have ever thought about working abroad. H It was just a gut reaction.

Exercise 6

Complete the table with idioms from this unit.

remembering and forgetting	1 _____
	2 _____
thinking	1 _____
	2 _____
not thinking logically	1 _____
	2 _____

Your turn!

Have you had trouble remembering something in the last few days? Use the idioms from this unit to describe your experience. For example:

*I couldn't remember the Italian word for butterfly yesterday although it was **on the tip of my tongue**.*

*Sometimes I have **a mind like a sieve** and by the afternoon, I can't recall anything from my morning lessons.*

