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# Uncommon Sense

Providing Clarity, Promoting Intelligence

## In This Issue

[Memorization  
Techniques](#)

[The University as Leftist  
Seminary](#)

[On Being a Grandfather](#)

[Add Ubiquitous to your  
Vocabulary](#)

## Quick Links

[Ara's Web Site](#)  
[Facebook Page](#)

## Join Our List

[Join Our Mailing List!](#)

Issue: # 061

October 20, 2013

## Greetings!

I hope this finds you well.

Welcome back for another round of cutting-edge content.

In this issue of *Uncommon Sense* I include a guest column written earlier this month by a student at Columbia University and published in the *Columbia Spectator*. The student, Jake Goldwasser, laments the almost constant brainwash (my words) of Leftist liberal thought that is crammed down the throats of today's university students -- and bear in mind that Goldwasser is a self-described liberal. I think his column simply proves Dennis Prager is correct when he describes today's typical university as being more of a Leftist seminary than an institution of higher learning. I have rendered in bold print a few segments of his revealing piece that caught my eye.



And, as always, please continue to send me an email response any time you have a comment or a question about anything I write. I am always pleased to hear from you.

OK, let's get started.

Warm regards,

Ara Norwood

## The Value of Memorization

There are a number of skills any developing professional should acquire: people skills, listening skills, presentation skills, writing skills, the use of computer software programs, speed reading, etc. One skill I'd like to elaborate on involves memorization. There are times that, at least for the short- to intermediate-term, you may find you need to memorize certain things, perhaps a list of ten items. Sometimes you may find you have to memorize a sequence of concepts that have to be delivered in a certain order, or a series of action items that must follow a specific timeline or progression.

When you find yourself in similar circumstances, say, when the number of items you have to memorize is ten or less, consider this technique. Take each number (one, two, three, etc.) and come up with a word that rhymes with that number. Nouns are best because nouns are *things* and it is easier to remember things.

For instance, I use the following words as my rhyming partners with the numbers one through ten:



1. Nun
2. Shoe
3. Key
4. Door
5. Hive
6. Sticks
7. Heaven
8. Gate
9. Vine
10. Hen

With those nouns now associated with the numbers one through ten, you can begin the memorization process of

whatever it is you are trying to internalize by creating an outlandish story which connects the concept of a Catholic Nun with the first item you are trying to memorize, followed by the imagery of a shoe with the second item in your list, followed by a key (perhaps a house key, a skeleton key, or a car key) to the third item, and so on. Let me illustrate.

Let's imagine you had to memorize a series of code words. They could represent football plays you need to run in a no-huddle offense scenario, or a series of martial arts techniques, or any other situation. Let's imagine that the code words are as follows:

1. Thrusting Wedge
2. Shield and Mace
3. Tripping Arrow
4. Fallen Cross
5. Returning Storm
6. Crossed Twigs
7. Flashing Mace
8. Hugging Pendulum
9. Wings of Silk
10. Gathering Clouds

Here is how I would memorize this list in this sequence: I would create a bizarre, unusual, outlandish story full of absurd visuals. Doing so would make it hard to forget. Here is how I might create such a story with the two lists in mind:

A Catholic Nun is **thrusting** forward with some device that serves as a **wedge**. She kicks up both of her shoes and one lands on top of a **shield** she is holding in one hand, and the other lands on top of an ancient medieval weapon known as a **mace**, which she is holding in her other hand. She drops both weapons and grabs a new weapon - a bow and **arrow**, except that the arrow is actually a key which she shoots at her opponent who is running away from her. The key causes him to **trip** (hence, tripping arrow.) But the fallen opponent jumps to his feet and continues running to the castle door, where he is trapped because the door is shut. Fortunately for him, a portion of that very door, in the shape of a **cross**, **falls** backwards, revealing an opening (hence, fallen cross.) As the man is entering into the cross-shaped opening of that door, he hears thunder in the distance and looks back in the direction in

which he came. He sees dark clouds gathering and moving in his direction, which is troubling because there was a **storm** just earlier. Hence, returning storm. And the first five elements are behind us.

So that brings us to number six, which rhymes with sticks. This one is easier given the nature of the list we are trying to memorize, for sticks and crossed twigs go together. So I imagine a bunch of sticks that are actually made of **twigs**, and they are, of course, in bundles that are **crossed**, at right angles to each other. Those are the sticks our hapless antagonist in the story is going to gather for a fire to warm his abode due to the impending storm. He needs the help of heaven (our associated rhyme with seven) and in doing so sees a vision of that nun's **mace**, only this time it's emitting a beam like a **flashlight**, hence flashing mace. He runs to this gigantic grandfather clock to hide from the nun who may be in hot pursuit, so he tried to blend in with the clock by hiding behind the moving **pendulum**, literally **hugging** it so as not to fall off. But he realizes this hiding place won't serve his purposes for long. Fortunately, he sees some unusual vines coming down the top of the grandfather clock. These vines are not of the standard variety, they are actually made of **silk**, silk that is covered in **wings**, enabling the vines to rise upward quickly, as if they can fly. Finally, he sees a giant hen, whose foot repeatedly scratches at the ground, and every time that hen scratches or claws at the ground, **clouds** mysteriously **gather** right above the man's head! He failed to avoid the storm after all!

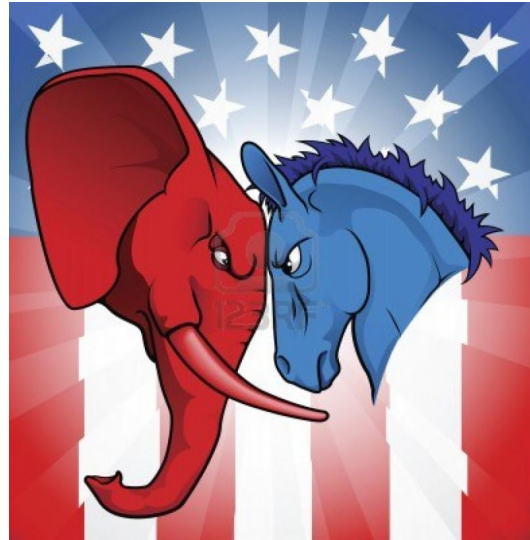
Now, before any of you suspect I need to see a psychiatrist, let me assure you that this technique, bizarre as it may sound to you, actually works! Try it out yourself, even for practice. You'll find if you come up with a strange enough story whose elements are quite picturesque, you'll be able to remember sets of up to ten elements most of the time. This is great for memorizing segments of a speech, or a complicated story, or any number of other situations. Let me know how you might use it.

## Guest Column

There's No *Right* Answer  
by Jake Goldwasser

I am not conservative by any stretch of the imagination. Every fall break I have gone to campaign for liberal causes, and as an underclassman I was on the board of the Columbia University Democrats. But the more time I spend

in class the more sympathy I have for conservatives, not necessarily for their beliefs, but for the position they have in public discourse at Columbia. My perspective may be skewed since I am a Middle Eastern studies major, but in my classes it is **taken for granted that the set of liberal positions is a list of objective truths.** I don't think it is funny when



professors crack jokes about the IQs of Republicans. It makes it more difficult to have genuine political discussions at best, and it perpetuates the stereotype of the Ivy League as a circle-jerk of liberalism at worst.

In Leo Schwartz's [last column](#), he talks about how once we leave Columbia we will leave the domain of constant self-congratulation and enter a world that is skeptical of our institution. It is not that professors collect empirical evidence to support liberal claims that makes the world sneer at places like Columbia. It is the self-righteous attitude, the certainty of conviction that comes from an institution whose purpose is to foster doubt and balanced discourse and critical thinking. I find myself writing papers in which I haven't even had time to consider whether I agree with my thesis, **because all of the reading is on one side of the political spectrum.** In fact, in many cases, I am not really sure what the spectrum of opinion on a topic is, because I have **only been exposed to a single part of it.** I understand that universities are places where professors can espouse their beliefs. I recognize that tenure is meant to protect professors' ability to maintain opinion. But it should not be the case that students feel uncomfortable voicing dissent because of the tone a professor has set.

In one of my classes, the token conservative occasionally responds to the professor's matter-of-fact claims by rehashing basic tenets of conservative ideology. Everyone in the class rolls his or her eyes, but I have come to appreciate it because it is nice to at least be aware that there are differing opinions. Opinions really aren't of much value without at least the pretense of deviation from them. In my classes **almost nobody makes conservative**

comments, which leads me to wonder whether Columbia actually has no conservatives or whether they don't feel comfortable enough discussing their opinions in public. I don't know which is more disturbing. I think we should respect whatever diversity of opinion we have on campus instead of making jokes about how President Bush couldn't pronounce "nuclear" properly.

I don't mind listening to lectures about the military industrial complex or the destruction that capitalism has caused. I do mind realizing in the first lecture **that my professor has an agenda so apparent** that it stifles the ability of the student to make judgments or suppresses his or her comfort when it comes to bringing up issues.

That being said, I have had some professors whose lectures manage to communicate opinion without condescension. I have had classes with respectful discussions where everyone felt comfortable sharing opinions, so long as they were supported by evidence -- it is possible. I am not saying professors cannot have opinions. I am not saying that an objective truth within a field is unimaginable, but I do think it is the responsibility of academics to foster a tone that is conducive to learning and -- just as important -- to debate.

*Jake Goldwasser is a Columbia College senior majoring in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and African studies.*

## From Ara's Journal

### On Being a Grandfather

I became a grandfather this year. While the circumstances that brought this about were not the ideal I had always envisioned, my grandson, now 4 months of age, has brought immense joy to our household, as that is where he lives with his mother.



There is a growing realization that my grandson may well represent my last chance to perform a singular role, one in which I may have fallen short the first time around with my own children, all of whom are now adults. It is said that no one writes a manual for how to parent. So we parents flounder. We do the best we can, or so we like to think. But some times we fall far short. We blow it periodically. Before we know it our kids are grown



and they start having kids, and we find our role is revisited, yet not quite the same.

As a grandfather, I fully recognize that while I can render advice on the key decisions that affect my grandson's upbringing, I cannot make them. Nor is it my place to dispense discipline for bad behavior.

But I can provide instruction on life's lessons. I can be a source of guidance and wisdom. I can teach him to be both a man and a gentleman. The possibility to be an influence for good is enormous and consequential. And it may well be my last chance to be such an influence for the generation this grandchild represents.

Because the values of my children have calcified, and I sense that my influence with them has waned. And while I may well be alive when my great-grandchildren are born, I will likely be deceased before they are old enough to understand any wisdom I may be able to impart.

Thus, being a grandfather is a role I sense is laced with significance. I look forward to this opportunity of a lifetime.

## The World of Words

### Ubiquitous

#### Building Your Power of Expression

**Ubiquitous**, adj

**Pronunciation:** yōō'bikwətəs

**Meaning:** Anything that is seemingly everywhere, or very common, or in rich abundance, could be said to be ubiquitous.

**Usage:**

- *Cowboy hats are ubiquitous among the male country singers.*
- *The burka is becoming a ubiquitous symbol of Iranian women.*
- *We live in a culture where the term "risk" has become ubiquitous.*



New subscribers, the Special Report "11 Ways to Beat the Odds" should have been sent out to you already. If you have not received it, please communicate that to me via email (ara@aranorwood.com).

For more information on my work, follow me on Twitter ("Ara Norwood"), or on Facebook (keyword "Leadership Development Systems") or via my website: [www.aranorwood.com](http://www.aranorwood.com)

**Sincerely,**

Ara Norwood  
Leadership Development Systems