



Family and Tutor Toolkit: Free Recall

RIDE Literacy Learning Lab for Dyslexia, Dysgraphia, and Dyscalculia

To access the full recording with Dr. Paul Riccomini, click [here](#).
All resources from this session can be found on the Learning Lab [website](#).

What is this kit for?

This kit helps your child remember what they learn in school by practicing free recall—pulling information from memory without looking at notes first. This strengthens memory and helps learning “stick.”

You do not need to be a teacher or content expert. Your role is to guide the routine and encourage your child to think.

What is Free Recall?

Free recall is when your child:
Tries to remember everything they can about a topic
Says or writes it down
Doesn't use notes at first

Caregiver Tips for Success

Don't correct right away — let your child think first
Normalize forgetting — “This is how we grow our brain”
Focus on effort, not accuracy
Keep it short and consistent (5–15 minutes is enough)
Celebrate improvement (“You remembered more after checking—
that's the goal!”)

Supporting Free Recall at Home and Outside of the Classroom

Activity 1

Tutors, caregivers, or parents can support retention by engaging in a modified brain dump at home. They can either use the **example Practice Test Retrieval (PTR) planning template** below or just have students use a sheet of paper or word processor.

The biggest difference between engaging in PTR at home and at school is that the caregiver, tutor, or parent may not be able to give feedback like a teacher might. In this case, some slight alterations can be made to help the student take charge of reviewing their own notes and then update their rating (see yellow section in the example below).

Example Planning Template: Here is an example based on students learning about the word, *secession* in history.

Write down everything you know about [insert a concept here or a class name here].	
Your Response:	
How do you think you did?	1 - What is [insert topic] again? 2 - I don't remember much about this concept. 3 - I remember key concepts but the details are fuzzy. 4 - I remember a lot but not everything 5 - Highly confident I know it all!
Review your notes from class or the textbook reading.	
Update your rating. Why did you update it in this way?	1 - What is secession again? 2 - I don't remember much about this concept. 3 - I remember key concepts but the details are fuzzy. 4 - I remember a lot but not everything 5 - Highly confident I know it all!


- Adapted from Riccomini, 2025

Supporting Free Recall at Home and Outside of the Classroom

Activity 2

Tutors, caregivers, or parents can engage in quick retention activities prior to each section. This helps reinforce learning from the high-quality curriculum materials (HQCM)* and connects it to the tutoring session.

Example Planning Template: Practice Test Retrieval to support retention of the concept “photosynthesis” using Picture Prompts.

Write down everything you know about this process.	
	
Your Response:	
How do you think you did?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1 - What is [insert topic] again?2 - I don't remember much about this concept.3 - I remember key concepts but the details are fuzzy.4 - I remember a lot but not everything5 - Highly confident I know it all!
Review your notes from class or the textbook reading or look up photosynthesis on [insert vetted classroom websites here].	
What feedback do you have on your original response after reviewing your notes?	
Update your rating. Why did you update it in this way?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1 - What is secession again?2 - I don't remember much about this concept.3 - I remember key concepts but the details are fuzzy.4 - I remember a lot but not everything5 - Highly confident I know it all!

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***In RI, the instructional materials that teachers and students are required to use every day are known as High Quality Curriculum Materials (HQCM).**

Supporting Free Recall at Home and Outside of the Classroom

Activity 3

Tutors, caregivers, or parents can reinforce retention by asking students what they remember from their classes (having them indicate with a thumbs up or down or using a 1-5 scale) and then reviewing the notes together, asking the student what else they now remember based on what they reviewed.

Even without the template to write, asking students to recall what they learned from school, having them check their responses against their notes (or by providing them accurate feedback) and then having them affirm their revised knowledge is a powerful retention strategy.