

your current lesson. This helps you decide what to concentrate on during the lesson, and it helps you discard what you don't need to know.

You can get this view before beginning a book or training manual. Flip through the major sections. Review the chapter titles. Read each chapter's introduction. Think about which chapters are more relevant, and which chapters contain secondary information. If your course lacks this organization, you may want to consider creating your own topic pyramid.

Go a level deeper

At some point down each branch of the pyramid, imagine a line drawn across. This marks the minimum needed knowledge for your course or topic. I suggest you go one pyramid level lower than this line. For example, understand and learn a few key points underneath a compulsory topic, even if these are not compulsory.

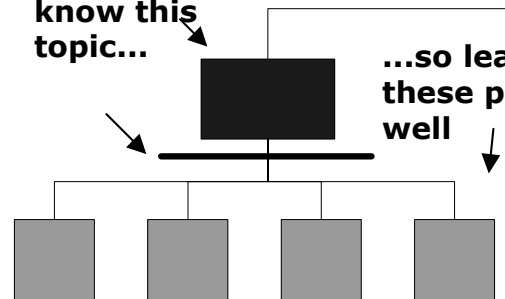
Let's look at our pyramid example. The black box is a compulsory topic. The shaded boxes are topics you don't *need* to know. If you learn the key points from these grey boxes, you will remember the compulsory topic better.

While this may initially take longer, it usually needs less

overall time and results in better recall. For example, you could spend thirty minutes trying to rote-learn a particular topic or chunk of content. Alternatively, you could spend fifteen minutes finding a few key points underneath that topic, and ten minutes summarizing those. Not only do you improve your understanding, you also remember it better as well. Over the following weeks you would likely spend less time reviewing that topic, compared to if you just tried to rote learn it.

You need to know this topic...

...so learn these points as well



Go one branch wider

Continuing the pyramid analogy above, widen out your pyramid by understanding topics related to your course but not compulsory. Looking again at our pyramid example, we see the main branch to the right of the core sailing topics is not compulsory. If you spend some time learning some key points from this branch, you will likely improve your overall understanding and retention of the compulsory topics.

For example, one particular branch may be the history of your topic. What impact has your topic of focus had on society? Who were some of the early pioneers, and what did they contribute to where you are today? You could also look up related jobs or industries.

While this information may not be compulsory to complete a course, it aids your learning and understanding of core topics.

