Making Macro Memorable: The Method of Loci Mnemonic Technique in the Economics Classroom

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Abstract

Economics in the classroom has benefitted greatly from research in education and pedagogy, primarily focused on experiential learning, interactive techniques, and other methods intended to elicit greater student participation. There remains, however, much content in economics that students have to memorize, at least for exams if not for general knowledge. We describe how to adapt the method of loci mnemonic technique in the economics classroom for the purpose of committing relatively large amounts of information to memory. Examples of the technique are given for principles-level sets of information, and a preliminary test of the technique’s effectiveness is presented.

Introduction

Professors and teachers of economics have benefitted greatly from research and analysis of different modes of classroom instruction. To increase student interest, attention, and information retention, instructors have utilized a growing array of active learning techniques to demonstrate the principles of economics. Some typical techniques include classroom games (utility-maximizing market behaviour, auctions, etc.), experiments, cooperative learning (pairs, team-teaching among groups of students, etc.), and using technology (simulations or in-class research on the internet). Other approaches involve the teaching of standard topics but doing so via a more accessible medium for students (demonstrating economic behavior or principles in movies, TV shows, literature, sports, and music). These novel techniques have undoubtedly made economics more enjoyable, relevant, and possibly even more effective for modern students.

A factor that should be considered in the use of these techniques is the longevity of the knowledge, or how well and for how long the information gets retained. Our own attempts at using active learning are enjoyable, and students invariably remember the exercises we do in class, but often fail to remember the lesson imparted in those exercises. In determining which in-class techniques to use, professors economize:

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