Many people consider learning to be an active endeavor, one that takes place in a classroom with a teacher and homework and tests. This intentional form of education is just one way to acquire knowledge. In fact, we absorb new information every day, often unintentionally: the best way to store tomatoes, the quickest way to get to work, the dog’s preferred chew toy. “It’s really important to give ourselves credit for the massive amount of information we learn without realizing it,” says cognitive scientist Pooja Agarwal, an assistant professor at the Berklee College of Music.

There is a distinction between committing facts to memory and learning. Memory refers to the retention of information, whereas learning is the long-term acquisition of knowledge or skills through experience, says Hadley Bergstrom, an associate professor of psychological science at Vassar College. We can memorize vocabulary words, but we learn how to speak a language.