'How important is your memory in your approach to your studies and what creative strategies do you employ to improve it?'

After an exhilarating month, Cape Coast, Ghana, the hot but hospitable locale for my semester abroad, is feeling like home. My freckles have popped out to welcome the sun, my stomach can process insatiable quantities of yam, mango and jollof and I’m eagerly embracing the Ghanaian ethos of, "It'll happen when it happens!" It is however the teaching and learning style that is proving the largest culture shock. With more emphasis on rote learning, my analytically abstract, Arts degree brain is being thrown into disarray. How can I recall such large quantities of information? How exactly does my regurgitation need to mirror what is said?

These questions are new in my African Studies journey, which has focused primarily on ideas, argument and debate. Assessments have reflected this ethos too with the majority of marks gained through essays worked on for weeks at home. In Birmingham memory plays second to critical thinking. So then, with this significant change in the demands of my studies I have had to embrace new tactics for learning, and have, it seems, formed a dependency on three things: coloured paper, coloured pens and funny accents.

First, in class, armed with coloured pens, I eagerly jot down notes, decorating them with endless underlines, highlights and doodles. Next, at home, I take paper and thick marker pens and carefully rewrite the notes into a giant, colourful explosion of a mind map. Sturdy arrows show me where my thoughts can develop and the process of using a thick pen gives my mind more time to absorb what is being put to paper. The visual learner in me is rejoicing by now. Next I physically involve myself with the thought process, using my finger to slowly trace the paths of the map and reading out each point. (...Funny accents are optional here!) I then attempt to rewrite it without aid from the original, and compare to check my success. Finally ensues the all important accent adventure. Taking on the persona of an eccentric teacher, I perform to an imagined class. I tell them – in the chosen dialect of the day – all I have learnt and explain it in terms their fictional brains will easily grasp. And so the route to memorising is complete. Used in tandem, these seemingly innocent things offer a window of memorial opportunity. Their playfulness reminds me to stay calm whilst they collaborate to ignite the visual, audio and kinaesthetic segments of the brain.

Although banishing me from my comfort zone, embracing this Ghanaian focus on fact will bring a new edge to my academic development. I'll finally be able to wow people with the general knowledge of Africa they expect of someone doing a degree in African studies. I'll be able to use the retained details to inform my analysis whilst, on the other hand, continuously questioning the facts. Plus.... who knows when my insanely enhanced memory will come in handy? First step Ghana, second step winner of the World Memory Championship and ten million pounds...

(Word Count: 500 words exactly)