Font of all knowledge? Researchers develop typeface they say can boost memory

Australian researchers say they have developed a new tool that could help students cramming for exams – a font that helps the reader remember information.

Melbourne-based RMIT University's behavioural business lab and design school teamed up to create "Sans Forgetica", which they say uses psychological and design theories to aid memory retention.

About 400 university students have been involved in a study that found a small increase in the amount participants remembered – 57% of text written in Sans Forgetica compared with 50% in a plain Arial.

Typography lecturer Stephen Banham said the font had an unusual seven-degree back slant to the left and gaps in each letter.

"The mind will naturally seek to complete those shapes and so by doing that it slows the reading and triggers memory," Banham told the Guardian.

Senior marketing lecturer Janneke Blijlevens said the concept of "desirable difficulty" underpinned the font's design.

"When we want to learn something and remember it, it's good to have a little bit of an obstruction added to that learning process because if something is too easy it doesn't create a memory trace," she told the Guardian. "If it's too difficult, it doesn't leave a memory trace either. So you need to look for that sweet spot."

The font was designed with year 12 students cramming for exams in mind but could also be used to help people studying foreign languages and elderly people grappling with memory loss.

Blijlevens is keen to test the font in other contexts such as proofreading.

Banham, who has created about 20 fonts, said the typeface would be best used for short texts.

"God no, you wouldn't want novels printed in it, it would probably induce a headache," he said.

The font took about six months to develop and there were three different versions tested.