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ARTFUL INSIGHTS: ENHANCING RECALL IN INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWS THROUGH SKETCHING

Investigative interviews are crucial for obtaining detailed and accurate information from witnesses and victims – information that is necessary for solving crimes and delivering justice.

Over the years, various techniques have been developed to enhance information elicitation from interviewees. One promising memory enhancing technique is the sketch procedure, which involves interviewees talking through a sketch of the details of an experienced event. Let's take a closer look at the effectiveness of sketching as an interviewing tool.

WHAT IS SKETCHING, AND WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE IN AN INTERVIEW CONTEXT?

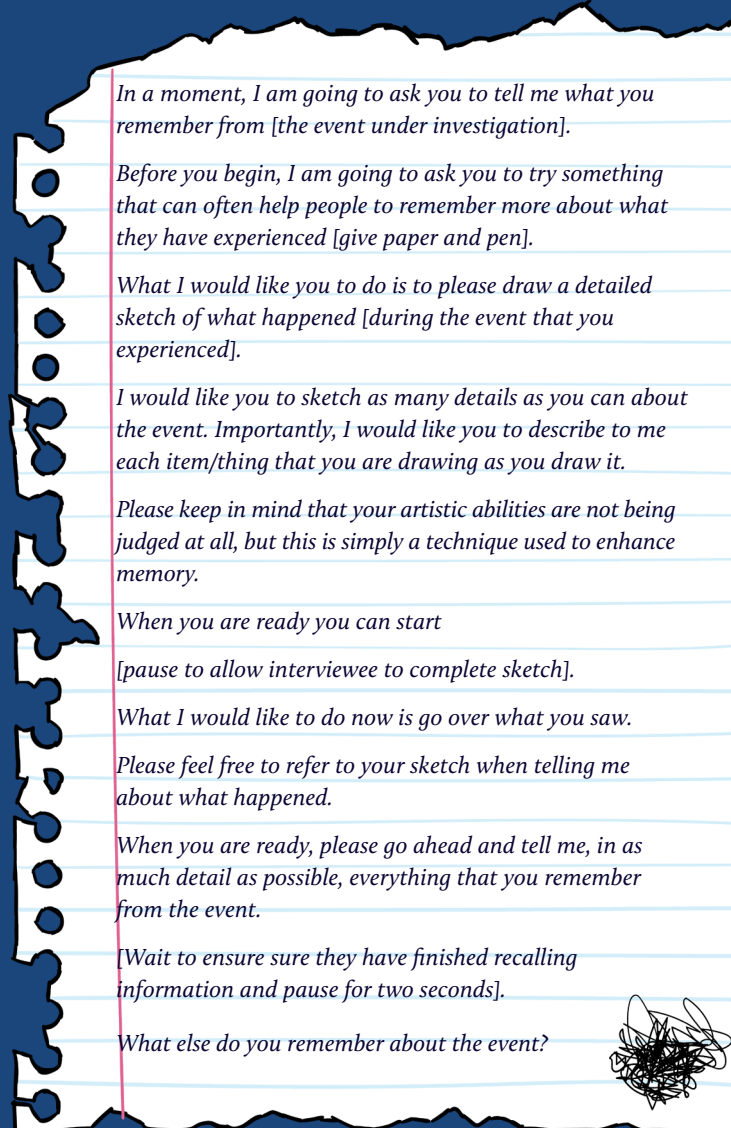
Sketching involves the interviewee talking through a detailed sketch of the experienced event. Sketching involves two main, concurrent steps, whereby the interviewee:

- i. draws the scene or elements of the event, and
- ii. provides a verbal explanation of the sketch.

Sketching is based on the principle of encoding specificity, which suggests that recall is enhanced when the same cues present during the encoding of an event are present during recall. By externalising memory cues through sketching, sketching aids in mentally reconstructing the context of the event, thereby enhancing the accuracy and detail of the information recalled.

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Here is what some sample sketching instructions look like (Eastwood et al., 2019):



WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY ABOUT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SKETCHING?

Enhanced Interviewee Recall:

Across various studies, sketching consistently leads to more correct details being recalled without increasing the number of incorrect details. For example, Eastwood et al's participants who sketched during an interview recalled 22% more correct details than those who did not sketch. This increase was particularly notable for object and action details, suggesting that sketching may be especially helpful for remembering visual and procedural aspects of events.

Enhanced Interviewer Recall:

Sketching also helps interviewers better understand the information provided by interviewees. By allowing interviewees to visually represent the scene and describe it, interviewers gain a clearer, more comprehensive picture of the event. By allowing interviewees to visually represent the scene and describe it as they draw, interviewers gain a clearer, more comprehensive picture of the event, which in turn can enhance their memory of the account. Luther et al. found that interviewers who watched an eyewitness create a sketch while describing an event recalled more correct details, fewer incorrect details, and fewer confabulations than those who only listened to the eyewitness's verbal account. These findings suggest that sketching can be a valuable tool for improving the accuracy and completeness of information gathered during interviews.

Detecting Deception:

In addition to enhancing interviewee and interviewer recall, sketching can be a valuable tool for detecting deception. Truth tellers and lie tellers tend to provide different types and amounts of detail in their sketches and verbal accounts. For example, Deeb et al. found that truth tellers tend to include more complications (unexpected events or obstacles) in their narratives, as these are a natural part of real-life experiences. Truth tellers also tend to provide more verifiable details, such as specific locations or actions that can be corroborated. Lie tellers, on the other hand, often strive to keep their stories simple and avoid details that could be easily disproven.

In the context of sketching routes travelled, Deeb et al. found that self-generated sketches were particularly effective for detecting deception. Truth tellers provided more details and were more accurate in their sketches than lie tellers, who often struggled to fabricate plausible routes and landmarks. This finding suggests that asking interviewees to sketch a route from memory, without the aid of a map, can be a useful technique for assessing the veracity of their statements.

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Application in Real-World Contexts:

The effectiveness of sketching has been demonstrated in both controlled experimental settings and more ecologically valid live interactions, suggesting its practical utility in real-world investigative interviews. Overall, sketching appears to be a fast, frugal, and effective tool for interviewers.

The converging evidence from the literature suggests that sketching is a highly effective technique that can be used in real-world investigative interviews. Incorporating sketching in your interview will help improve the accuracy and completeness of information obtained from interviewees and help you (as the interviewer) better understand the information you obtain, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of your interviews.

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