

Eliciting Information

A Multi-Modal Format for use with Cooperative Sources

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Memory is malleable:

Even with cooperative sources, information elicitation can be challenging because of how memory works. Sources may:

- Make distortion or confabulation errors
- Omit information
- Forget information.

Across four experiments, we examined various factors that can affect memory for witnessed events, such as:

- Being distracted while witnessing an event
- Witnessing an event with multiple perpetrators
- Attending to events that include conversations and actions
- Witnessing a series of repeated events.

To facilitate memory recall and reporting, we tested the effectiveness of a multi-modal format including:

- A Self-Generated Cues mnemonic
- Timeline Technique
- Follow-up open-ended questions.

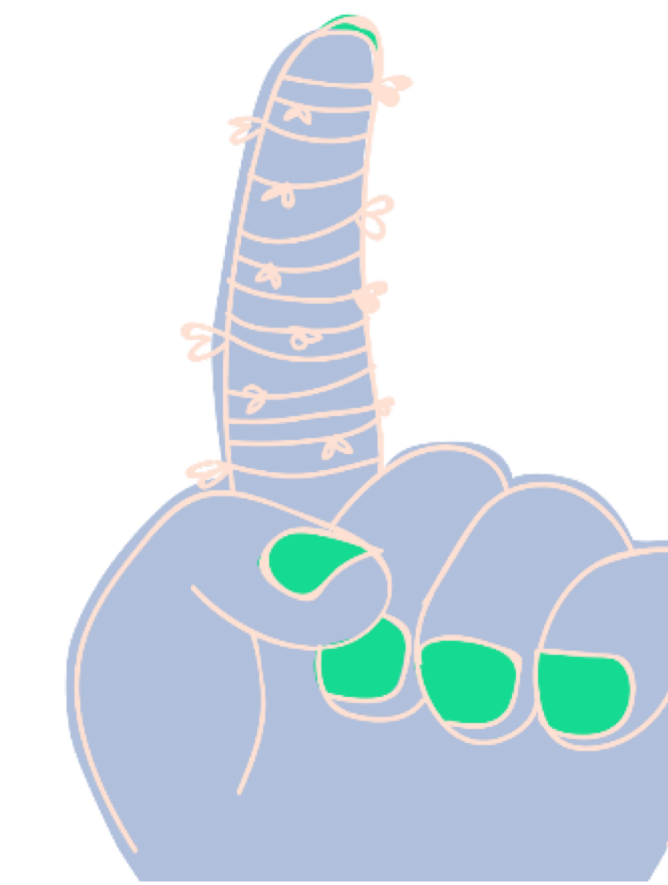
Self-Generated Cues:

An interviewee-led mnemonic that capitalizes on the associative nature of memory & prompts the most salient details of the witnessed event (Kontogianni et al., 2018)

Interviewees are instructed to:

- “write down the first six things that come to mind from the event – it doesn’t matter what these things are.”
- “focus on each item to see if it can help them remember more.”

Use of Self-Generated Cues in conjunction with the Timeline facilitates more correct info (cf. to Interviewer-Generated Cues and to No cues) under full but not under divided attention.



How this research informs techniques for intelligence gathering:

- Administration of SGC is quick and allows for an open-ended interview led by the source instead of the interviewer
- The Timeline Technique, in conjunction with SGC & follow-up questions, can be used as a multi-modal interviewing format to enhance recall for both unique and repeated events
- The Timeline Technique, bolstered by follow-up questions facilitates the reporting of actions & statements of multiple perpetrators. Thus, this approach can be particularly useful when seeking to obtain information about networks & groups of people.

What’s next?

- The development of an electronic timeline format to use online and to extract information in real-time
- Testing of an electronic tool that can be used to elicit information about networks & groups of people.

The Timeline Technique:

(Hope, Mullis, & Gabbert, 2013)

An innovative self-administered reporting format that uses a physical timeline and interactive instructions and facilitates retrieval for complex events at immediate and delayed recall.

- The Timeline Technique is more effective than a free recall format for both unique and repeated events
- The use of the Timeline Technique facilitates recall and improves the reporting of attributions of actions and statements to persons, “who did & said what and when”
- The Timeline Technique format is bolstered by Self-Generated Cues and follow-up open questions to facilitate recall for both actions and conversations.



Fig 1. Reporting an event using the timeline with Descriptions (lined cards) and Actions (post-its) across conditions.



“Tell me more about this...”:

Follow-up open-ended questions can elicit additional information, but they need to be used with caution!

- Across three experiments, interviewees were asked 3 to 5 follow-up questions based on a report provided with the Timeline Technique or a free recall format
- New information was reported in response to follow-up questions, but accuracy in reporting dropped (by between 14%-27%), regardless of the format used to provide the initial account
- Instructions that reminded interviewees to not guess, to withhold an answer and to provide broad details (e.g. between 5ft9in- 6ft) instead of precise details (e.g. 5ft11in tall) if not certain, did not improve accuracy to match the levels of the initial account.

Practical recommendations:

- The use of effective mnemonics facilitates a more detailed initial account
- Open-ended questions are preferable to closed/ multiple choice prompts, because they allow interviewees to have more control over their responses & choose what to report.

