

Memory Interference

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will identify causes of unretrievable memory. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Consolidation
2. Interference
3. Suppression and Repression

1. Consolidation

Consolidation of memory involves forming a permanent long-term memory. Memory is formed through a process of encoding, storage, and retrieval. Encoding is the first part of forming a solid long-term memory.

If a memory is not available to a person, then it wasn't encoded or stored properly. It will not be available at all; consolidation has been interrupted.



TERM TO KNOW

Consolidation

The process of forming permanent, long-term memories

2. Interference

If a memory is not accessible, on the other hand, it can still be available. A person can still have the information consolidated in their long-term memory, but there is a problem with actually retrieving that memory.

One of the reasons that someone can have trouble retrieving a memory is that there is some **interference**. Interference refers to when new and old memories compete with each other and make it difficult for you to remember certain bits of information.

There are two different types of interference:

- Proactive interference, which is when old memories interfere with the retrieval of new memories.

↪ **EXAMPLE** You can't remember a new phone number that you've just learned because it's too similar to your old childhood phone number.

- Retroactive interference, which is when new memories interfere with the retrieval of old memories.

↪ **EXAMPLE** You may have trouble remembering the name of someone you met at a party last weekend because you just met a brand new group of people at a party that you're at now.



TERM TO KNOW

Interference

When new and old memories compete with each other and make it difficult to remember

3. Suppression and Repression

While interference is a way that a person can unintentionally affect the retrieval of memories, memories can also be intentionally forgotten, either consciously or unconsciously. This is a mechanism by which a person protects themselves from psychological harm. This may be especially true for memories that are unpleasant or uncomfortable for a person.

Suppression is a way that a person intentionally and consciously attempts to forget a memory that they have.

↪ **EXAMPLE** A family member brings up something that makes you angry while you're in public. You can intentionally choose to either ignore or forget that memory to avoid a scene. This allows you to revisit the situation later at a more appropriate time.

Repression, on the other hand, is unconsciously forgetting some unpleasant memory.

↪ **EXAMPLE** Emergency room surgeons can repress particularly bad memories of things that they saw while working, like horrific accidents or traumatic incidents that they might have encountered on the job.

It's important to note that repression can lead to all kinds of harmful psychological effects on its own, according to psychodynamic theories. While repression might be necessary in certain instances, it can also lead to negative effects in its own right.



TERMS TO KNOW

Suppression

Consciously attempting to forget a memory

Repression

Unconsciously forgetting a usually unpleasant memory



SUMMARY

Today's lesson has provided a brief overview of the causes of unretrievable memories. A person might not be able to retrieve a memory if they have experienced interrupted **consolidation** when a memory isn't encoded or stored properly. Sometimes people experience **interference** with the

retrieval process, when new and old memories compete with each other and make it difficult to remember.

A memory can be intentionally forgotten, either consciously or unconsciously, through **suppression and repression**. Suppression refers to pushing an unpleasant thought or emotion from your mind until there is a more appropriate time to deal with it. On the other hand, repression is unconsciously forgetting a (usually unpleasant) memory and can cause psychological harm, according to psychodynamic theorists.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Erick Taggart.



TERMS TO KNOW

Consolidation

The process of forming permanent, long-term memories.

Interference

When new and old memories compete with each other and make it difficult to remember.

Repression

Unconsciously forgetting a usually unpleasant memory.

Suppression

Consciously attempting to forget a memory.