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Action for Memory: Cognitive Offloading and Demands on Short-Term Memory

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Abstract: An important part of understanding the embodied nature of cognition involves uncovering the factors that influence individuals' decisions to offload cognitive demands onto their body or physical environment. In the present investigation we explore these factors in the context of a task that involves using the physical environment to store information. In particular, we investigate the influence of memory load and individual differences in STM capacity on the tendency to write down items (when free to do so) in a memory task. Results demonstrate that the tendency to offload memory demands is driven by both factors and that individuals offload well before their STM capacity would suggest they needed to. In addition, the likelihood of offloading was also related to how much effort a participant was willing to invest in the task. Implications of these results for our understanding of cognitive offloading behaviour will be discussed.