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Attentional Enhancement at Event Boundaries

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Abstract: A fundamental aspect of everyday processing involves identifying discrete events within continuously unfolding sensory experience. However, the processes enabling determination of event boundaries remain poorly understood. Recently, inconsistent conclusions have emerged regarding attentional processes associated with detection of event boundaries. Use of the Dwell-Time Paradigm has indicated enhanced attention at event boundaries (e.g., Hard, Recchia, & Tversky, 2011), whereas evidence from the Rapid Serial Visual Presentation paradigm (e.g., Huff, Papenmeier, & Zacks, 2012) indicates impairment. We employed a change-detection procedure similar to the RSVP, except that the change to be detected was uniform across the entire visual field, rather than varying with respect to the viewer's spatial locus of attention. Changes occurred either at event boundaries or mid-stream within event segments. With spatial locus of attention rendered irrelevant, participants displayed significantly faster reaction time to changes coinciding with event boundaries, implying that viewers selectively target event boundaries with heightened attention.