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How Increasing Item and Cue Duration Influence Item-Method Directed Forgetting

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Abstract

Our ability to forget on demand is called intentional forgetting, and it can be examined using the item-method directed forgetting paradigm. Recently, an inhibition account has gained popularity, arguing that to-be-forgotten (F) items are inhibited in working memory to impair their representations in long-term memory. In a series of experiments, we tested predictions from this inhibitory account by increasing the item and cue durations, respectively. Inhibition predicts decreased recognition for F items with increasing duration. In item recognition, increasing item duration increased memory for both to-be-remembered (R) and F items, in line with a selective rehearsal account of directed forgetting. There was no differential effect of cue duration on memory for R and F items. In associative recognition, increasing item duration increased memory for both R and F items but increasing cue duration increased memory only for R items, which is counter to an inhibition account.