



Interviewing witnesses

Maximising a perishable memory recovery

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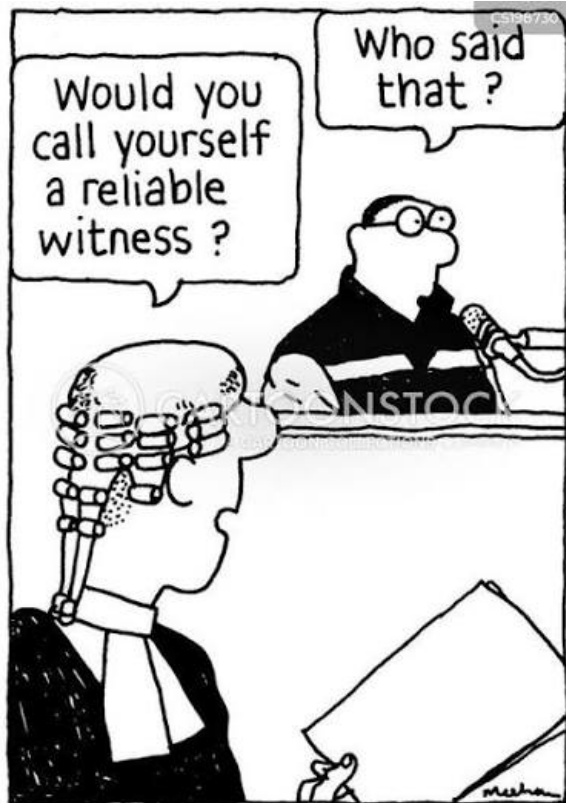
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Human information processing

- In
- Humans actively process information, we don't just passively receive, store, and retrieve information
 - we construct what we see
- out
- we construct what we remember
 - Context and expectancy have big influence
 - Memory works by associations

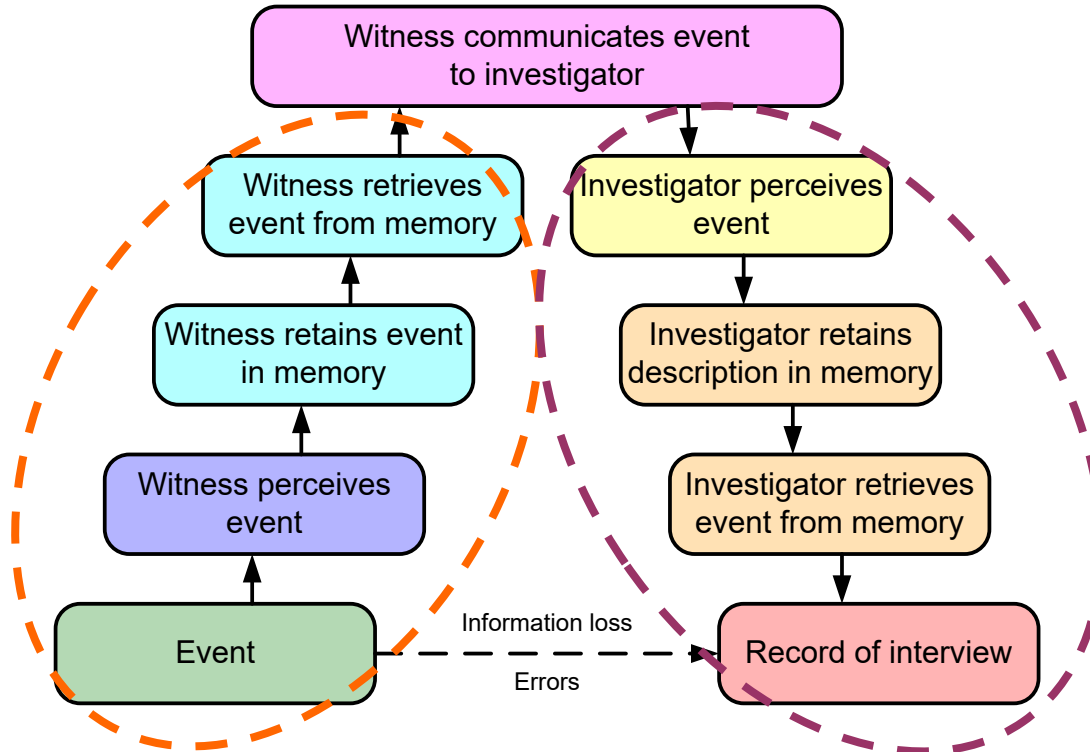


Reliability



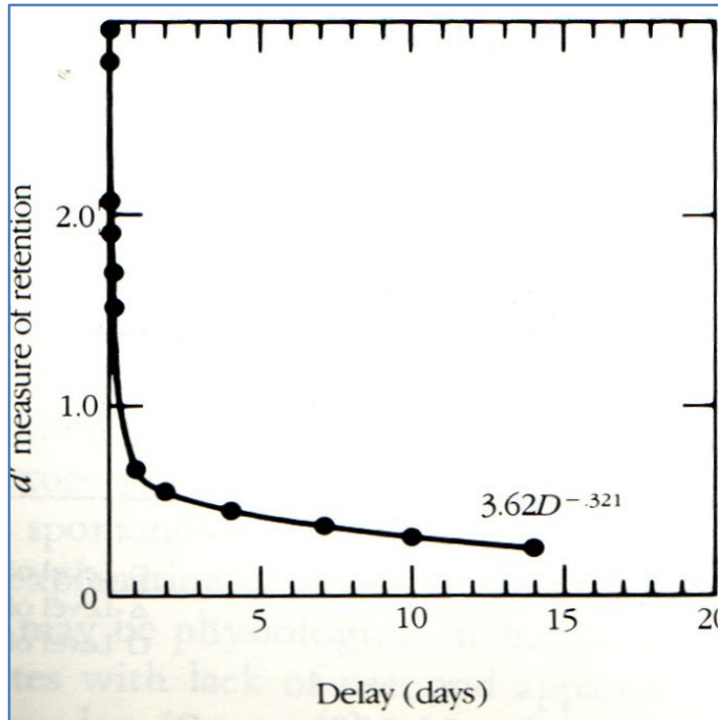
- So, are witnesses reliable?
 - Several phases of interview process where information can be lost or distorted
 - Witnesses are never 100% reliable
 - BUT...good interviewing techniques will minimise distortions

Information flow



Limitations of memory retention:

Time since event



Limitations of memory retention:

Amount of thinking about event



- Every time witness thinks about event, they lay a new memory trace
- Next time they remember their last memory (not the event)

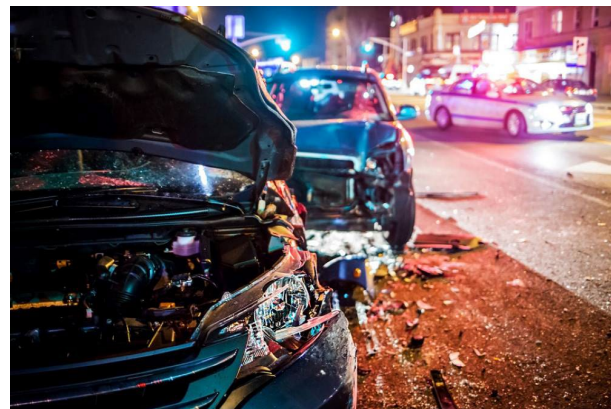
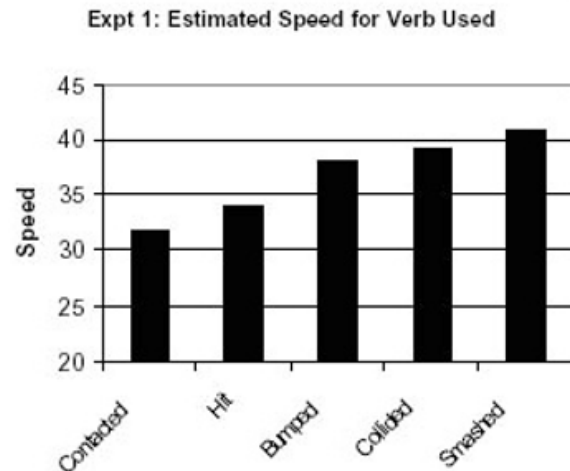
Example: Loftus & Palmer (1974) study



- People shown films of car accident, then asked:
- How fast were the cars going when they
 - hit / smashed / collided / bumped / contacted each other?

Example: Loftus & Palmer (1974) study

- Speed estimates 10 mph higher for “smashed” vs “contacted”
- Asked one week later if saw broken glass (there was none)
 - 32% of “smashed” and 14% of “hit” said yes

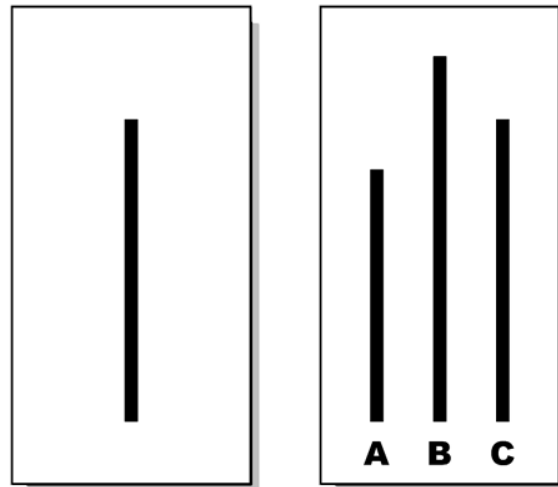


Social pressures ~ conformity

The importance of interviewing people individually



Asch, 1950s



Comfort with situation



- rapport developed between interviewer and witness
- whether witness feels interviewer cares (about their story &/or about their injury/emotions)
- Whether they feel interviewer is listening

Investigator's communication style

- Use questions that allow the witness to describe all of their memory

“tell me everything you saw from the moment you first noticed the aircraft...”



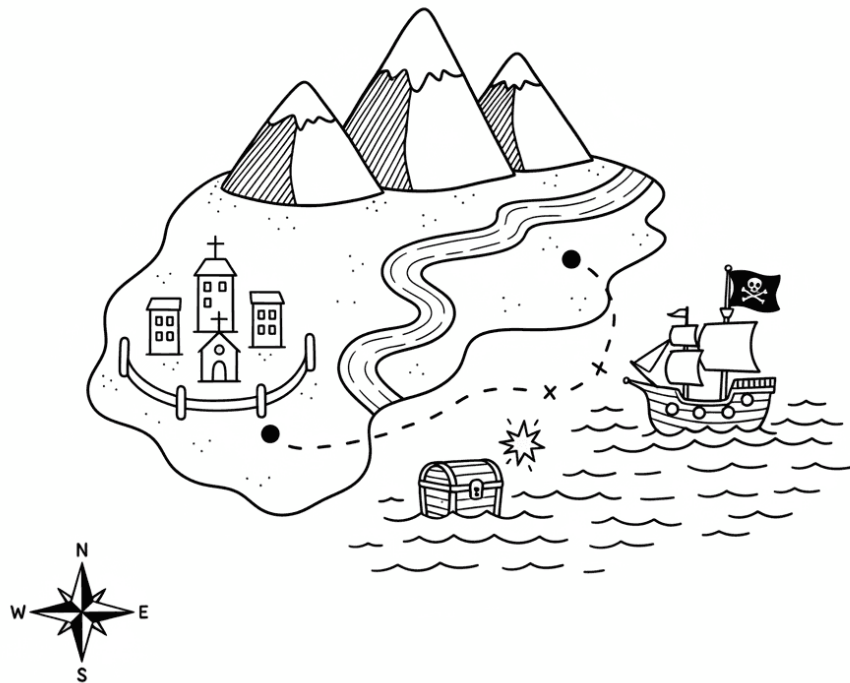
Language skills



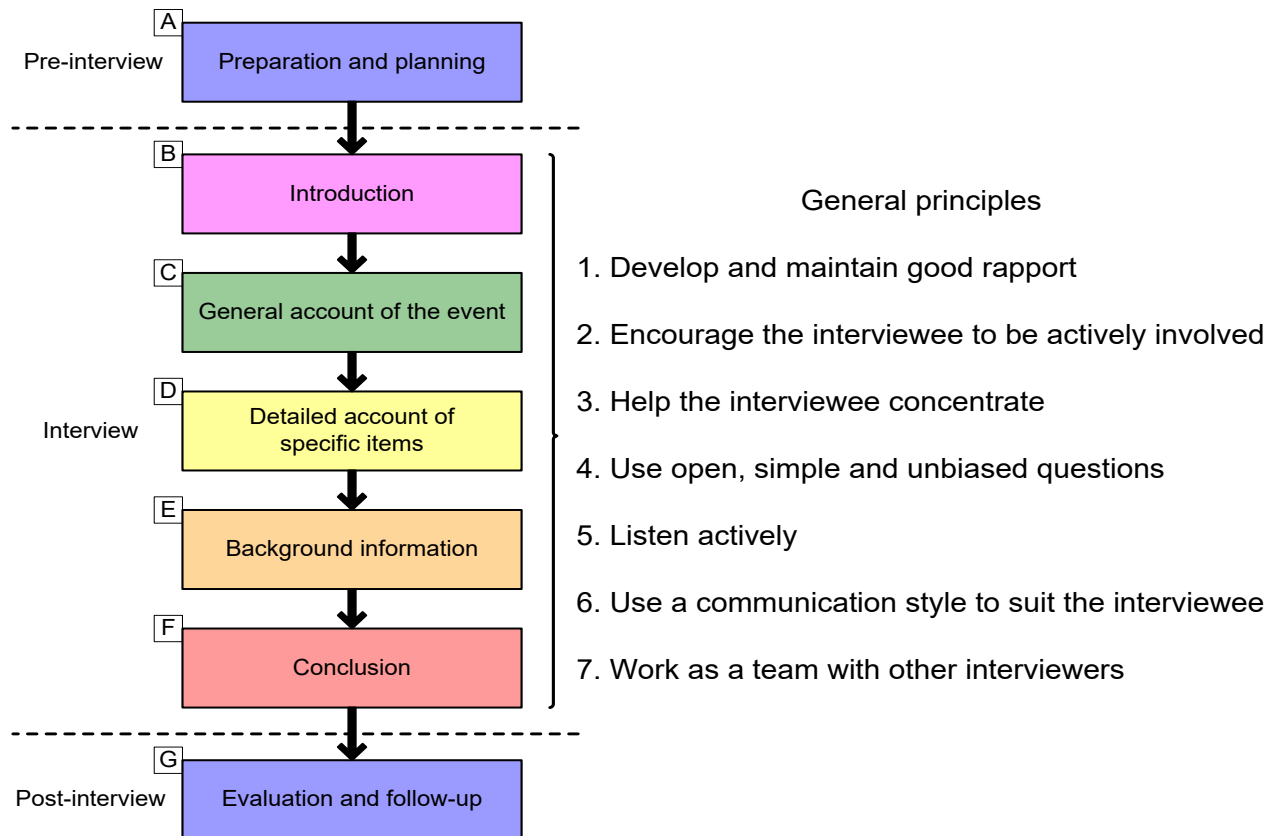
- Language barriers
- Children
- Describing things witnesses don't know the name of (eg. aircraft parts)

Communicating spatial information

- Easier to draw some things than describing them
 - e.g positions of objects relative to each other, flight paths etc
- Some things difficult to recall



Interview stages



Developing and maintaining rapport

- Provide positive greeting
 - Ask how they are feeling
 - Inquire as to their injury / personal status
- Try to view the situation from their perspective
- Treat interviewee's statements as truthful
- Be patient, calm, relaxed
- Maintain eye contact
- Introduce personal information about yourself

Unstructured free recall



- Use at start of interview
- Responses can vary in length
- Follow up with open questions
- Examples:
 - *What happened?*
 - *Tell me everything you can remember?*

Open questions

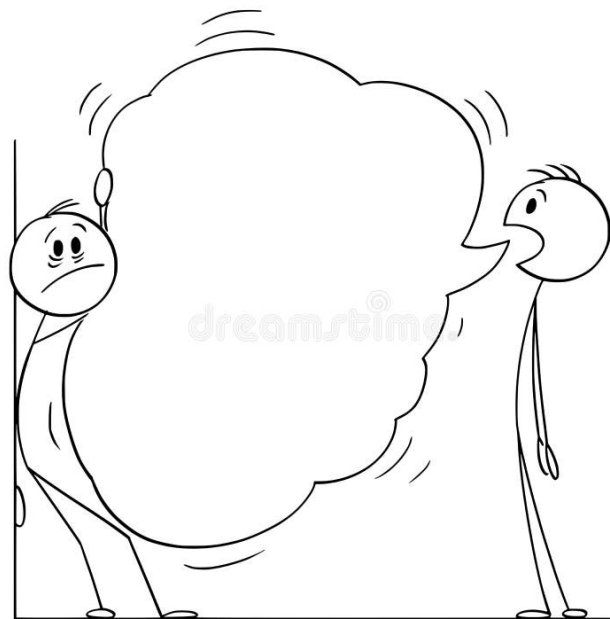
- Allow for an unlimited response in the interviewee's own words
- Cannot be answered with one or two words
- Encourage lengthy responses, open up discussion
- Information generally more accurate than from closed questions
- Start broad then move to narrow / framed



"Oh gosh, have I been talking too much again?"

Open questions - examples

- *Tell me everything you can about the landing?*
- *Please describe what happened next?*
- *How would you describe your workload at that time?*
- *What can you tell me about the weather conditions?*



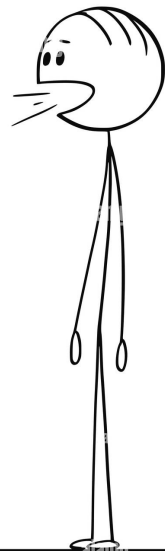
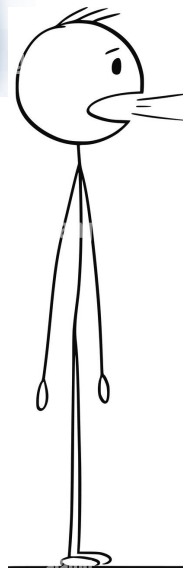
Closed questions

- Limit the amount or scope of information that interviewee can provide
- Can be answered with one or two words
- Used for completeness, filling in detail
- Information generally less accurate from closed questions



Active listening

- Don't interrupt
- Use pauses
- Give feedback to indicate you are listening and understanding
 - nod head, say '*uh huh okay*'
- Maintain eye contact
- Lean forward
- Paraphrase in follow-up questions
 - *you said earlier that there were bright yellow flames ... can you tell me more about that?*



Recreating context

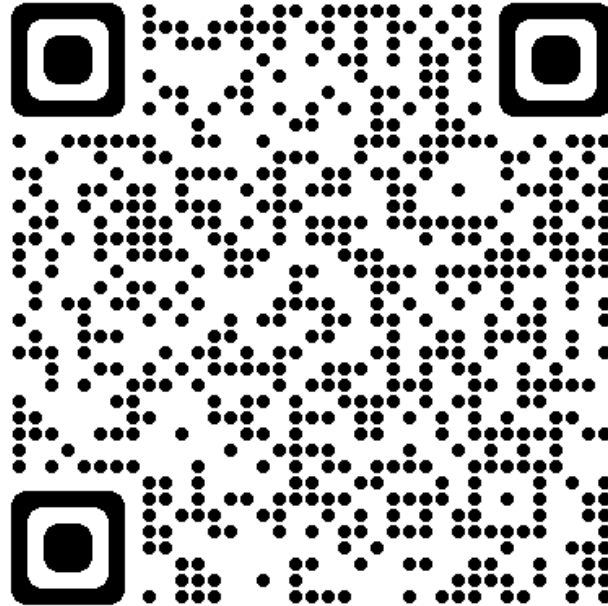
- Witness example
- *Before you start, I'd like you to take a few seconds and try to put yourself back in the same situation as when you witnessed the event. Think about where you were standing, what you were feeling, what the weather was like, who were you with at the time - try and get a really good picture in your mind. Don't say anything just yet, just think about the situation for a few seconds.*

Recap



- Time since event
- Amount of thinking about event
- Post-event information
 - media
 - other witnesses
 - investigators
- Interference with similar events
- Sense-making

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