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STRATEGIES OF REMEMBERING:
A STUDY OF DIRECTED FORGETTING

W. K. TIMMINS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Australian National University, Canberra.

December 1976.
This thesis describes original research carried out by the author in the Department of Psychology of the Australian National University from April, 1970 to December, 1976.

W. K. Timmins.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am most grateful for the advice and encouragement given by my supervisors, Dr. W. P. Bellingham and Dr. M. L. Cook. Their help has been invaluable to me.

Neville Whitworth and John Palmer provided expert advice in the construction of the electronic programming equipment used. Lisa Bird, Jeff Field, and Len Storlien provided welcome encouragement at many times. I would particularly like to express my gratitude to Jess Giddings for her careful typing of my thesis. Finally, I would like to express my appreciation to my wife, Judy and my daughters, Laura and Elizabeth, who made a trying time worthwhile.

The following papers are based on work reported in this thesis:


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ABSTRACT

This study was an investigation of the processes underlying people's performance in directed forgetting experiments. A variety of techniques were employed for this purpose, including paired associate probe, free recall, and running recognition tasks.

Experiments 1 and 2 used a repeated item technique to examine the relative contributions of selective rehearsal and item differentiation in determining the effect of an instruction to forget. Both rehearsal and item differentiation were found to contribute, but the latter was shown to be effective only when subjects were unaware of item repetition, or unable to attach any significance to it.

Experiments 3, 4, and 5 investigated the importance of the temporal location of a forget instruction relative to the placement of the to-be-forgotten items, as well as the effect of providing alternative dimensions for encoding the stimuli. Experiment 3, which was a free recall task, demonstrated that when the instruction to forget was close to the to-be-forgotten words, they received minimal processing and were quickly forgotten. When it was located further away, however, the effect was substantially reduced. Experiments 4 and 5, which were paired associate tasks, demonstrated that subjects were unable to make the best possible use of a forget instruction when there was uncertainty as to the form that the instruction might take.

It was concluded that the first five experiments, which employed variants of standard directed forgetting paradigms, in fact examined subject's strategies for remembering. Experiments 6 and 7 used new procedures which were designed to examine whether people can actively forget. The results of those experiments suggested that they can, provided the experimental situation is appropriately structured.