AP PSYCHOLOGY | UNIT 2

TOPIC 2.7

Forgetting and Memory Challenges

Memory can fail because information was never encoded, becomes hard to retrieve, competes with other learning, or is reconstructed inaccurately.



WHERE CAN MEMORY BREAK DOWN?

ATTEND → notice it

ENCODE → form a trace

STORE → retain it

RETRIEVE → access it

BY THE END, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO...

1. Interpret the forgetting curve and identify encoding or retrieval failure.
2. Distinguish proactive from retroactive interference.
3. Explain constructive memory, misinformation, and source errors.

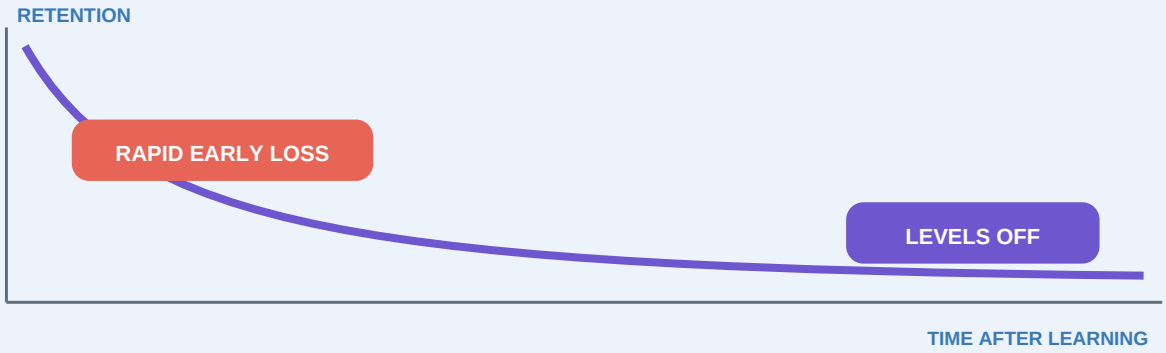
BIG IDEA

Remembering is not a perfect replay. Memory is selective, cue-dependent, and reconstructive.

1 Why memories become unavailable

Forgetting can reflect weak encoding, fading access, retrieval difficulty, or competition between memories.

THE FORGETTING CURVE



LOCATE THE BREAKDOWN

ENCODING FAILURE

Information never entered memory strongly enough.

CONSOLIDATION

A new trace is stabilized over time; disruption can weaken retention.

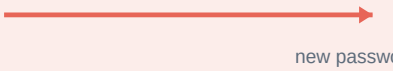
TIP-OF-THE-TONGUE

The answer feels close but cannot be fully retrieved yet.

INTERFERENCE: WHICH DIRECTION?

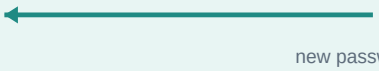
PROACTIVE

OLD information disrupts NEW learning.



RETROACTIVE

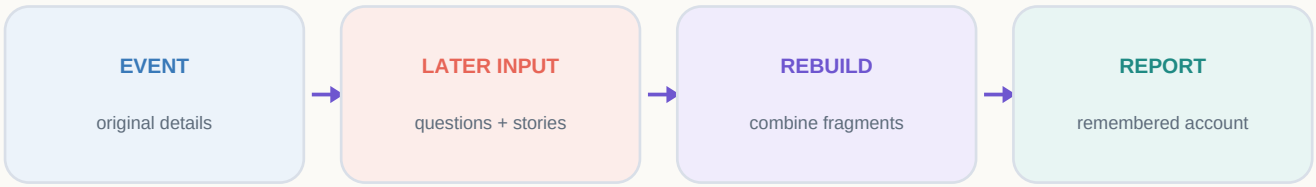
NEW information disrupts OLD memory.



2 Memory is reconstructed

Later information, expectations, imagination, and missing source details can change the remembered account.

NOT A CAMERA: A RECONSTRUCTION



COMMON DISTORTIONS

MISINFORMATION

Misleading details after an event become part of the remembered story.

SOURCE AMNESIA

The information is remembered, but where it came from is forgotten or confused.

IMAGINATION

Repeatedly imagining an event can increase confidence that it occurred.

REPRESSION A psychodynamic explanation proposing that distressing memories may be kept from awareness to protect the ego.

EYEWITNESS MEMORY: HANDLE WITH CARE

- Use neutral questions; leading wording can introduce misinformation.
- Separate confidence from accuracy; confidence alone does not prove correctness.
- Check the source of each detail and look for independent evidence.