

A little elaboration goes a long way: the role of generation in eyewitness suggestibility.

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Although research has documented that perceptual elaboration (e.g., imagery) can increase false memory, prior research has not ascertained whether such effects are due to the act of generation or simply from exposure to perceptual details. Two experiments explored this question using the eyewitness suggestibility paradigm. Experiment 1 compared the effect of generating descriptions of suggested items with the effects of reading elaborated versions of the items or the suggested items alone. Experiment 2 compared participants who generated descriptions to participants who read the same descriptions. Generating a description increased false memory and increased accurate memory for the items' actual source, relative to comparable control conditions. Generation also increased claims of having a (false) vivid recollection of the items in the event. Overall, the results suggest that conditions that require people to describe the appearance of objects that they do not remember are even more pernicious than conditions that involve exposure to such details.

Mem Cognit. 2007 Sep;35(6):1255-66. Lane SM, Zaragoza MS. Department of Psychology, Louisiana State University Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803, USA. slane@lsu.edu
