

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs

Difficulty of the task. How difficult or easy is the task? Memory is the persistence of learning over time. To name the seven dwarfs, we must get the information into our brain (encoding), retain it over time (storage), and now get it back out (retrieval). The research on memory examines the factors that influence those processes.

- A few of you may note that the task is culture-bound and that you never learned the names.
- For some, you will claim the task is difficult simply because it's been too long since you heard the story or saw the film.
- Some of you may have been distracted.
- A few of you are big into Disney and may have found this pretty easy.

Tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon. Did you have the feeling that they knew a name but were unable to retrieve it? The tip-of-the-tongue (TOT) phenomenon occurs when the retrieval process does not produce a complete response but produces parts that must be constructed into a whole. Most fundamentally, it shows how forgetting may result from retrieval failure, rather than encoding or storage failure.

Organization of memory by sound, letter, and meaning. Is there a pattern in which you recalled the names? Is there any pattern? Memory is organized by sound, letter, or meaning. Look at your wrong answers.

- Many of your wrong responses will be similar in sound, letter, and/or meaning to correct dwarf names. For example, wrong answers are likely to include two-syllabled names ending in a y-sound; five of the seven correct names end in y and have two syllables.
- Wrong guesses may also begin with the letter s or d because these letters each occur as the initial letter of correct names twice. You may also recall words similar in meaning to actual dwarf names. For example, did you recall Lazy, Clumsy, Droopy, or Grouchy.
- Organization by sound, letter, or meaning will typically cause people to recall names in a run or pattern of similar names. Runs occur when the generation of one correct item serves as a cue that improves recall of other items with similar sounds or meanings. All of you will demonstrate these runs for both correct and incorrect names.

Recall versus recognition. It is likely you can remember more names with a recognition task. Recall involves a two-step process: generation of possible targets and identification of genuine ones. Recognition is generally easier because the first step is already complete and one only has to decide if the information is correct. Try the following list (circle the write answer): Grouchy, Gabby, Fearful, Sleepy, Smiley, Jumpy, Hopeful, Shy, Droopy, Dopey, Sniffy, Wishful, Puffy, Dumpy, Sneezy, Lazy, Pop, Grumpy, Bashful, Cheerful, Teach, Shorty, Nifty, Happy, Doc, Wheezy, and Stubby.

So, what is the right answer? Research suggests that the order, from most likely to least likely recalled, is as follows: Sleepy, Dopey, Grumpy, Sneezy, Happy, Doc, and Bashful. Respondents are more likely to recall the five rhyming names and to recall them in a run, an example of organization by sound. Subjects are least likely to remember Bashful, an example of organization—or absence of—by meaning.