

Cognitive Interview

The cognitive interview is a questioning technique used by the police to enhance retrieval of information from witness memory. Köhnken et al (1999) found that the cognitive interview gained 34% more information than the standard police interview.

Geiselman et al (1985) suggested there are four key components which make up the cognitive interview technique;

The interviewer tries to **mentally reinstate** the environmental and personal context of the crime for the witnesses, perhaps by asking them about their general activities and feelings on the day. This could include sights, sounds, feelings and emotions, the weather etc.

Witnesses are asked to report the incident from a **different perspective**, describing what they think other witnesses (or even the criminals themselves) might have seen.

They are asked to recount the incident in a **different order**. Geiselman & Fisher proposed that due to the recency effect, people tend to recall more recent events more clearly than others. Witnesses should be encouraged to work backwards from the end to the beginning.

Witnesses are asked to **report every detail**, even if they think that detail is trivial. In this way, apparently unimportant detail might act as a trigger for key information about the event.

It is believed that the change of narrative order and change of perceptive techniques aid recall because they reduce witnesses use of prior knowledge, expectations or schema.

Geiselman et al (1985) compared the cognitive interview with a standard police interview and hypnosis. Participants viewed a film of a violent crime and after 48 hours were interviewed by the police using one of three methods: the cognitive interview; a standard interview used by the Los Angeles Police; or an interview using hypnosis.

The number of facts accurately recalled, and the number of errors made were recorded.

The average number of correctly recalled facts for the cognitive interview was 41.2, for hypnosis it was 38.0 and for the standard interview it was 29.4. There was no significant difference in the number of errors in each condition. They concluded that the cognitive interview leads to better memory for events, with witnesses able to recall more relevant information compared with a traditional interview method.

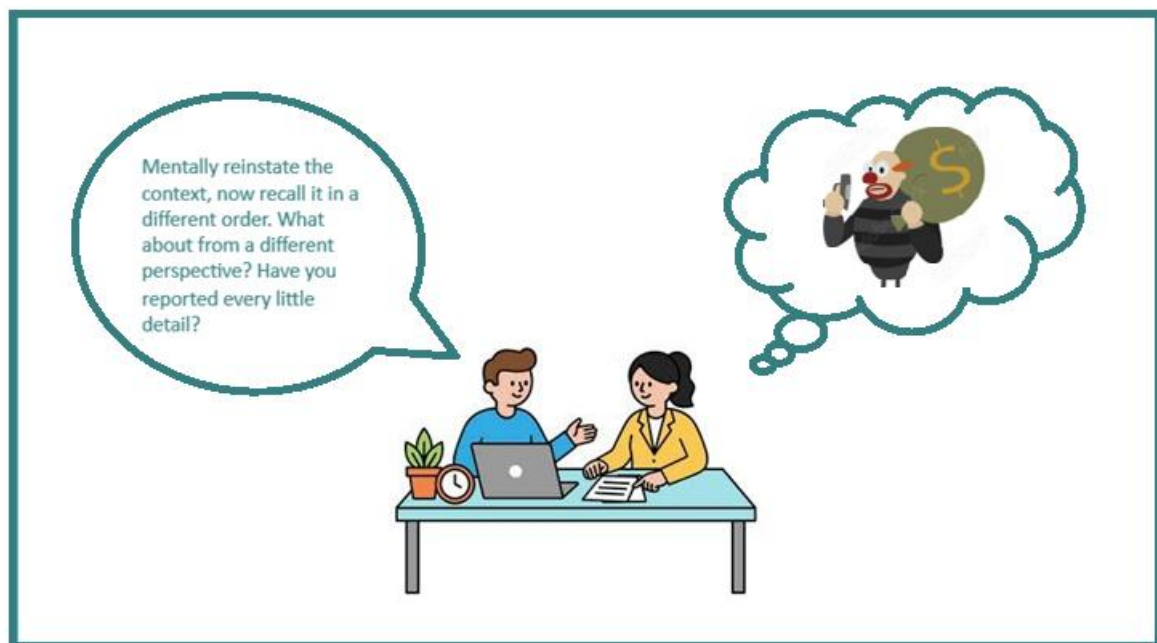
Geiselman et al (1985) suggested that in order to achieve more detailed and accurate eyewitness accounts, the cognitive interview technique should be used. They offered a way in which this could be achieved in practice.

At the start of a cognitive interview, the interviewer should attempt to help the witness feel relaxed and seek to tailor their language to suit the individual.

The witness should be encouraged to recreate their internal and external conditions at the scene (e.g. the mood they were in, their thoughts, the weather, etc.), recalling the event backwards and forwards in time, and recalling it from other people's perspectives.

The interviewer should be non-judgmental and avoid personal comments throughout.

The interview should focus on utilising retrieval cues, as Geiselman claimed that recalling details of an event in a variety of different contexts is key to triggering the retrieval of accurate information from memory, something which the standard police interview was restrictive in doing.



Later the enhanced cognitive interview devised by Fisher et al (1987) added detail to focus on the social dynamics of the interview interaction. This is believed to result in more accurate recollection of events.

