

Memory Validation and Reliability

Understanding the encoding, storage, and retrieval processes to assess the fidelity of recall (KA-MOD-015).

The Three Stages of Memory

1

Encoding (Input)

Converting sensory information into a construct that the brain can store.

Susceptible to distraction & attention failure.

2

Storage (Maintenance)

Retaining the encoded information over time through neurological changes (consolidation).

Susceptible to decay and retroactive interference.

3

Retrieval (Output)

Accessing the stored information when needed (recall or recognition).

Susceptible to suggestion and context effects.

Common Memory Failures (The Seven Sins)

Transience / Decay

The gradual weakening or fading of memory over time.

Misattribution

Recalling information correctly, but attributing it to the wrong source, time, or place.

Suggestibility

Memories being unconsciously altered by leading questions or external information.

Bias (Consistency)

Current beliefs or feelings altering the memory of past events.

Blocking / Retrieval Failure

A temporary inability to retrieve information ("tip-of-the-tongue" phenomenon).

Persistence (Intrusive)

Inability to forget undesirable or traumatic memories.

Note: The seventh sin, **Absent-mindedness**, relates to a failure during the initial encoding stage.

Validation Strategies for Reliability

Corroboration & Context

- External Evidence:** Does the memory align with documented facts or physical evidence?
- Source Monitoring:** Was the source of the memory (personal experience vs. hearsay) accurately tracked?
- Consistency:** Is the core narrative consistent across multiple, independent tellings?

Minimizing Contamination

- Cognitive Interview:** Use techniques to maximize retrieval without leading the witness.
- Blind Administration:** Interviewers should not know which details they expect to hear.
- Avoid Reinforcement:** Do not confirm or deny details provided, to prevent memory contamination.