

TOK WOK CHEAT SHEET: Memory

TOK Definition /Explanation:

Memory is mainly defined as the faculty by which the mind stores and remembers information and something remembered from the past. Memory is often appealed to justify our knowledge claims, as all our knowledge about the past is ultimately based on memory and our entire stock of knowledge depends critically on memory. (Van de Lagemaat, 2015: 252)

Key Related Vocabulary:

- **Amnesia:** unable to remember things
- **Short-term memory:** our ability to hold small amounts-around seven bits-of information in our mind for a few seconds before forgetting them
- **Nostalgia:** the tendency to see the past in an exaggeratedly positive light
- **Google effect (or Google amnesia):** the tendency to forget information that can easily found online.
- **False Memory syndrome:** a deeply rooted false memory of an allegedly traumatic event that comes to dominate someone's personality
- **Great divide theories:** theories that claim that the shift from oral to written culture fundamentally changed the way people think

Key Concepts or theories explained:

The Nature of Memory: there are types of memory: personal, factual and practical. Though an important part of what it means to know something is to be able to remember it, memory is not an original source of knowledge. We tend to consider people who have a good memory as intelligent and smart.

The mechanics of Memory: Most psychologists reject the storehouse model (memories work like a camera) and subscribe instead to the reconstruction model (memories are reconstructed every time we access them). Research suggests that context is a powerful cue to help retrieve information from memory.

The reliability of memory: Not only do we forget things, but we also misremember them. Different people can have very different memories of the same event. We all tend to be heroes of our own drama (**Egocentric bias**) and like to tell a good story when recalling events (**Narrative Bias**). Our view of the past can also be influenced by our current mood (**Emotional Bias**). We are more likely to remember dramatic events than mundane ones (**Vividness Bias**). We also tend to be wise after the event and adjust our memories accordingly (**Hindsight Bias**). You may unconsciously take an idea, phrase or song from someone else while believing that you are its source.

The ethics of memory: There is a difference between what we actually remember or forget, and what we ought to remember or forget. We have moved to a world of digital media, it may become harder for us to forget various things and meanwhile, eliminate specific unwanted memories. Using drug to strengthen and/or erase certain memory remains difficult ethical questions. Heroes and events are selectively kept alive in historical memory to strengthen sense of national identity.

Related Real Life Situations¹:

1, Is eyewitness testimony a reliable source of evidence? In the case of Jennifer Thompson who was raped in 1984 and picked out Ronald Cotton (RC) as the rapist.

¹ Dunn, Michael. *Real life situations and knowledge questions for memory* (11th June 2013). theoryofknowledge.net. <http://www.theoryofknowledge.net/ways-of-knowing/memory/real-life-situations-and-knowledge-questions-for-memory/> Last accessed: 24th August 2015

Though RC was finally proved innocent by DNA evidence, he spent 11 years in prison. (Van de Lagemaat, 2015: 263)

2, How important are eyewitness accounts to the study of history? The events of the 1960s are fading into history, but John Lewis believes eyewitness accounts are key to continued progress.

3, What are the implications of being able to erase and restore memories? Neuroscientists have effectively wiped a memory from rat brains, only to revive it again by manipulating synapses. In the film *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, the memories of the two main characters related to each other are erased successfully by technology, but they still fall in love with each other when they reencounter.

4, To what extent is one's memory important to the construction of their identity now? In the novel of *Missing Person*, the main character Guy Roland is an amnesiac detective who lost his memory ten years before the beginning of the story, which opens in 1965. Roland embarks on a search for his own identity.

Related Knowledge Questions:

- Can we know things that are beyond our personal present experience?
- Can our beliefs contaminate our memory?
- To what extent do we shape memory with our own personal paradigms?
- Which way of knowing provides us with the most reliable memory?
- To what extent should memory be trusted when one studies history?

Brief overview of how this WOK is used in Areas of Knowledge:

Memory plays an important role in a number of AOKs but in particular, history and human sciences. Academically, memory is closely associated with history, much of which is based on eyewitness recollections of events, which may have happened long before they are put on record. In human sciences, like law, the perceived accuracy of a witness's memory may determine whether someone is found innocent or guilty in a criminal trial. In conjunction with other ways of knowing, memories can help us to establish-or at least bring us closer to-the truth. (Van de Lagemaat, 2015: 252-273)

HOW/WHEN DOES IT HELP CREATE KNOWLEDGE?	WHY/WHEN SHOULD WE BE WARY OF USING IT TO CREATE KNOWLEDGE?
Memory as connection to the past - when it comes to knowledge of past, memories are the only thing that is available to us.	Memory as a reconstruction model- Memory is not an original source of knowledge and are likely to be flawed
Memory as a personal phenomenon- Personal memory gives you your sense of identity. Shared memory is important in all personal relationships.	The right to forget- we sometimes need to forget negative experiences so as to move on, for the sake of our mental health and social relationships.
Memory as a social phenomenon- Lots of historical events and national heroes are reinforced in historical memory	The politics of memory- historical memory can easily blur into national mythology- which brings obvious dangers with it.