



Episodic Memory ^[1]

Assisted Self-Help ^[2] 16.2K reads

Episodic memory is one of the two components of declarative memory with the other being semantic memory. It allows us to remember experiences that have occurred during the course of our life.

The medial temporal lobe and the hippocampus located within are critical parts of forming episodic memories. If we had no medial temporal lobe or it was damaged, we would be able to create procedural memories ^[3] (declarative memory's ^[4] counterpart) such as riding a bike but unable to remember when or where we learned to do so.

Prefrontal Cortex

The other important part of the brain with regards to episodic memories is the prefrontal cortex which also forms these type of memories. If our prefrontal cortex suffered an injury, we would still be able to learn new things but it would all be done in a disorganized manner. This would take the form of recognizing an item from our past but being unable to remember how we first encountered it.

Some psychologists believe the prefrontal cortex is necessary in order for us to organize and store information in an orderly manner.

While semantic memory ^[5] requires several exposures, episodic needs only one. Semantic memory lets us know what something looks, feels, acts or tastes with our episodic memories depending on this representation. If we have a new experience with something, our semantic memory will be updated to include this new information.

Episodic to Semantic?

What happens to episodic memory is a subject of much debate amongst psychologists. Some believe that all episodic memories eventually become semantic ^[5]. This means that all information we have gathered about a specific event is forgotten.

Another viewpoint suggests that when we repeat a story often enough, we do not remember the real event and are only telling a story that has already been written in our mind. This view is opposed by those who suggest that episodic memories always remain in our mind. We need semantic knowledge for episodic memories and vice versa.

Autobiographical Memory

Autobiographical memory [6] refers to recollections of our own personal history. However, it is impossible to recall everything that has happened in our life. The way in which we remember things is greatly affected by past experiences. While our autobiographical memory is reasonably reliable, the memories themselves are not because memory itself can be distorted.

Memory Throughout Life

Very few people can remember what happened in their childhood in what is known as infantile amnesia. The reminiscence bump occurs when we recall incidents from our teenage and young adult years.

The recency effect explains why the majority of people are able to remember a large proportion of events from their last few years. When we first develop autobiographical memories, they become stored as episodic. However, it is still unclear as to whether these memories are the same as episodic ones or if they end up as semantic memories over the course of time.

Episodic memories involve general and specific events such as remembering when we first drove a car and how we felt whilst doing it. We also remember facts such as the name of the President when we were born. Even flashbulb memories can come under the episodic banner. An example of this is remembering where you were when the first man landed on the moon.

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[1] <https://staging.explorable.com/en/episodic-memory>

[2] <https://staging.explorable.com/en>

[3] <https://staging.explorable.com/procedural-memory>

[4] <https://staging.explorable.com/declarative-memory>

[5] <https://staging.explorable.com/semantic-memory>

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