

The specificity of the labeling effect on memory: what kinds of labels improve retrieval?

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Abstract: Relational retrieval—retrieval that is based on common relational structure, such as an underlying principle or pattern, is typically rare. Previously, we found that providing relational labels at encoding and/or test can improve relational retrieval (Jamrozik & Gentner, 2013). In the current work, we tested the specificity of the labeling effect by comparing the effects of relational labels (e.g., inoculation) with domain labels (e.g., psychology). Because people are naturally likely to attend to domain information, we predicted that domain labels would have a smaller effect on domain retrieval. Using a cued-recall paradigm, we varied the presence of relational and domain labels at encoding and test. Relational labels increased relational retrieval, but domain labels had no effect on domain retrieval. These results suggest that relational labels have a strong effect on retrieval (relative to other kinds of labels) since they increase people’s attention to information that is not naturally salient.