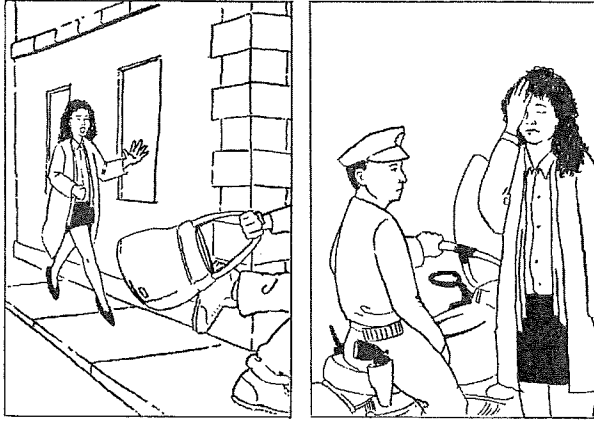


## CASE STUDY

## 10

Eyewitness  
Testimony

**Directions:** Read the following case study, then answer the questions that follow.



### Background

Hypnosis has been used with traumatized crime victims to help them reconstruct crime scenes. Defense attorneys, however, have questioned both the techniques used and the results of the hypnosis. Some studies suggest that hypnosis can be used, either inadvertently or deliberately, to alter memory. Other studies have concluded that little memory enhancement occurs through hypnosis. As a result of these studies and defense attorney objections, some states limit the admissibility of evidence discovered through hypnosis. Psychologists, therefore, have researched other ways to enhance the memory of eyewitnesses without using hypnosis. Funded by a grant from the National Institute of Justice, two researchers, Ronald Fisher and R. Edward Geiselman, developed a nonhypnotic interview process that helps the eyewitnesses reconstruct the events.

Using crime scene training tapes designed to train police officers, the researchers developed the Cognitive Interview. The interview is based on four principles:

1. **Event-Interview Similarity** Based on the theory that we remember things better when placed in a similar situation, the Cognitive Interview seeks to reconstruct as accurately as possible the external, emotional, and cognitive conditions that existed at the time of the event. Even small details, such as weather, are not ignored.
2. **Focused Retrieval** Every effort is made during the interview process to keep the witness focused on the events. The interviewer prevents outside distractions and interruptions.
3. **Extensive Retrieval** Although the process seems tedious to many eyewitnesses, the Cognitive Interview encourages the witness to repeatedly attempt to retrieve the event's details. Research has shown that the more attempts someone makes to remember particular details, the more likely he or she is to successfully retrieve the details from memory.
4. **Witness-Compatible Questioning** Individuals organize and store memories differently. The Cognitive Interview, therefore, is not a set series of questions. The interviewer must determine the general way in which an individual witness stores memories and tailor the questions to help the witness reconstruct the event in as much detail as possible.

The interview itself is divided into several phases. At first the interviewer asks the witness to recount the event in as much detail as possible. Although a record is made of the account, the interviewer uses this phase to plan for the more detailed interview to follow. The interviewer seeks to understand the way in which the witness stores and processes memories. In the second phase, the interviewer guides the witness through a detailed reconstruction of the events using the information learned during the first phase. Finally, the interviewer uses various mental representations to learn more details about the events. For example, if a witness cannot remember a name, he or she will be asked to recall any information about the name, such as number of syllables, first letter, or ethnicity.

*(continued)*

Often these bits of information will help the witness remember additional details.

**Hypothesis**

Does the Cognitive Interview yield more information from eyewitnesses of real-life crimes than the standard police interview?

**Method**

Sixteen robbery detectives from the Metro-Dade Police Department were included in the study. Initially, the police officers were asked to tape-record selected interviews with eyewitnesses to robberies. The criteria for recording the interviews was as follows:

“(a) Each case was to be serious enough so that ample time and resources were available, if necessary, to conduct a thorough interview; (b) at least one victim or witness had a decent chance to observe the suspect or suspects and the event; and (c) each interviewed victim or witness had to be reasonably fluent in English and cooperative.”

During the initial phase, the 16 detectives conducted 88 interviews. These were used as the pretraining interviews.

Next, the detectives were divided into two groups. One group was trained in the Cognitive Interview technique. The other group was not trained and became the control group. After training, the Cognitive Interview group practiced the technique and received feedback from the trainers.

The post-training phase consisted of 24 interviews using the Cognitive Interview tech-

nique and 23 interviews from the untrained group. These interviews were analyzed for the number of relevant facts discovered. Statements of opinion or unrelated facts were ignored.

**Results**

Two types of results were analyzed:

- 1. Interviews before and after training from the same detective were assessed.
- 2. Interviews from the trained group were compared to interviews from the untrained group.

Detectives who were trained in the Cognitive Interview process obtained on average 47 percent more useful information after training compared to their pretraining interviews. In fact, for one detective the amount of useful information obtained increased 115 percent.

When comparison was made between the trained and untrained group, the trained group obtained 63 percent more information than the untrained group.

**Conclusions**

Training in the Cognitive Interview process, which uses psychologists’ knowledge of how memories are stored, can significantly increase the amount of information obtained from eyewitnesses. The Cognitive Interview process can replace hypnosis and other speculative forms of memory enhancement as a means of obtaining accurate, detailed eyewitness accounts.

Source: Fisher, R., Geiselman, R., & Amador, M. (1989). Field test of the cognitive interview: Enhancing the recollection of actual victims and witnesses of crime. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74 (5), 722-27.

**Understanding the Case Study**

Directions: Answer the following questions in the space provided.

- 1. Why has hypnosis been questioned as a means of helping eyewitnesses remember crime scene events?

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2. What are the four principles of the Cognitive Interview?

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3. Who was the control group in this study?

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4. Describe the two ways in which the data from the study were analyzed.

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 **Thinking Critically**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions in the space provided.

5. In the Cognitive Interview, the interviewer seeks to reconstruct the external, emotional, and cognitive conditions surrounding the event. Why are each of these important in remembering events?

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6. The Cognitive Interview process yields more facts about events than standard police interview techniques. Further research has examined whether recall using the Cognitive Interview technique results in more incorrect facts. What would you expect the findings to be?

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