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[Home](#) > Autobiographical Memory

Autobiographical Memory

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Autobiographical memory relates to things we remember during the course of our lifetime. It can be divided up into lifetime periods, general events and event-specific knowledge. All information contained within this type of memory relates to ourselves including knowledge of the kind of person we were, are and will be.

Our autobiographical memory contains memories of events that have occurred during the course of our lifetime. It can be divided into episodic and semantic memories. Our episodic memories help us recollect times, locations and people while semantic memories deal with general facts. Our knowledge base consists of information pertaining to ourselves including what we are, what we were and what we may become. We can divide this information into a trio of categories:

- Lifetime Periods
- General Events
- Event-specific Knowledge (ESK)



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Lifetime Periods

Lifetime periods are general memories of specific periods in our life. For example, the time one spent in college, or in a relationship or in a certain job.

Memories of these periods are usually very clear at the start and end of the timeframe but the rest of the period is hazy. Knowledge of general events that occurred in that time are also remembered.

General Events

Despite the name, general events are normally more focused than lifetime periods. Often, when one memory of an event is recalled it triggers memories of related events.

Normally, a person's achievements or lack thereof are the central theme. This in turn imbues an individual with a greater sense of self as these are memories of how good or bad he/she is at doing something.

Event-Specific Knowledge (ESK)

ESK memories revolve around specific events with vivid reminders of what occurred. Initially, ESK memories have a high level of detail but this quickly fades with specific memories standing out. There are certain events that will withstand memory decay which are:

- **Originating Events:** The starting point of a major event
- **Turning Points:** When a specific plan was altered
- **Anchoring Events:** Situations that strengthened an individual's beliefs or goals
- **Analogous Events:** Something that happened in the past that dictates future behavior

ESK memories are made up of sensory-perceptual features which are extremely important in distinguishing memories of real occurrences from recollections of things that never happened. Memories that contain a high level of ESK are likely to be real. ESK memories are not organized in the same way as lifetime periods or general events. These are the type of memories that are spontaneous and can seemingly appear from nowhere.

Four Types

Autobiographical memory [1] types can be divided into four distinct categories:

- **Biographical or Personal:** Our autobiographical memories contain information of a biographical nature such as knowledge of who we are, our birth place and names of our parents.
- **Reconstructions vs. Copies:** Copies are memories with large levels of sensory-perceptual and visual detail. Reconstructions contain new interpretations or information learned later on.
- **Generic vs. Specific:** Specific memories have detailed information from a certain event. Generic memories are vague in nature and do not contain a great deal of detail barring general memories of an event.

- **Observer vs. Field:** It is possible to recollect autobiographical memories from a completely different perspective. Field memories are remembered from our original perspective. Observer memories are ones recalled from a different point of view. The older a memory is, the more likely it is to be of the observer type. Field memories are vivid while observer memories are like reconstructions.

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Links

[1] <http://bps-research-digest.blogspot.com/2011/01/how-is-autobiographical-memory-divided>