The book reflects the culmination of a four year collaborative relationship between myself and Cordon Bower. When I arrived at Stanford University as a graduate assistant to Cordon Bower, there was an ongoing research program concerned with organizational and imaginal factors in various memory tasks. As we tried to become precise, even quantitative, in fitting organizational theory to free recall data, its differences from associationistic models of free recall seemed to evaporate, frankly, because neither theory had been formulated with any real precision up to that time. It became clear that what was needed was a theory of memory that was both general and precise.

The outcome of rather intensive ruminations and discussions was the theory for human associative memory (HAM) that was proposed in the book. This was first worked out in detail in a long ‘dissertation proposal’ in which I had several goals: To present an associative theory of sentence memory, to report evidence relevant to it, to relate the theory to the historical tradition of associationism, and to indicate how a few standard ‘verbal learning’ phenomena might be interpreted in terms of this approach.

Since that time HAM has been subject to considerable experimentation and discussion. It has been found to be wrong on some points and controversial on others. I was bothered by the fact that HAM did not say much about how memories were used in thought. This led to the development of the ACT model which has a production system for mental procedures which interfaced this procedural component with a memory model derived from HAM. Cordon Bower was bothered by the fact that HAM does not address the issues of how large bodies of text material are processed, how large knowledge structures are organized in memory, and how these large structures are used to interpret text. This led him to an interest in story comprehension, scripts and schemata, and reconstructive memory processes.

Still HAM is very much with us and has important influences on our thinking about these new problems. In HAM we find many concepts and analyses that we can use as foundations for our new endeavors. Shortly, a revised edition of the book will appear. This edition is an attempt to focus on those aspects of the HAM theory that still seem relevant for the 1980s.