

This Week's Citation Classic

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Bousfield A K & Bousfield W A. Measurement of clustering and of sequential constancies in repeated free recall. *Psychol. Rep.* 19:935-42, 1966.

When permitted to do so, subjects tend to impose their own sequential organization in recalling a list of randomly presented words. Theoretically derived formulas for measuring two manifestations of this phenomenon comprise the basic content of this study. [The Science Citation Index® (SCI®) and the Social Sciences Citation Index™ (SSCI™) indicate that this paper has been cited over 190 times since 1966.]

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"Research on organizational processes in recall had become extensive and there appeared to be a need for more refined quantitative measures of this phenomenon. The authors believed this requirement could best be met by basing the measures on assumptions derived from psychological theory. The theory advanced by Underwood and Schulz appeared to be the most suitable.¹

"The study was the result of a son-father collaboration. The work was performed at the University of Connecticut. The son, the first author, was a 'pure' mathematician. The father, the second author, was a more or less 'pure' experimentalist. Their habits of thinking were very different, and the collaboration was

difficult. It could never have been made without drawing heavily on a fund of mutual respect and affection. It was necessary to translate a psychological theory into a group of mathematically precise propositions. The report had to be written in a form acceptable to both parties. This was not easy. When finally completed, a different trouble arose. It was rejected, after a long interval, by the journal to which it was submitted on grounds that the theory was 'weak.' At any rate, the authors made several new basic modifications and it was readily accepted by *Psychological Reports*. The supply of 200 reprints was soon exhausted.

"Why the demand for this article? The formulas in the study were simple, up to date, and provided useful information. The authors hoped that for at least some of the readers, the steps involved in the derivation of the formulas were a useful model for the quantifications of psychological data.

"Two types of inferences are plausible. Genuine interdisciplinary collaboration must be spontaneous and not from arbitrary assignment. The second is that rejection of a paper by journal referees, while unpleasant, should not be discouraging when the authors are experienced, presumably competent, and confident of the validity of their work.

"The second of the authors knows a very able researcher who quit publications completely after experiencing the humiliation of rejection by journal referees. There are probably many others. Out of fairness it should be said that serving as a journal referee is in a sense, a labor of love – though not for the author of the article or the one making a research proposal. It is a nonremunerative and thankless undertaking. Perhaps a little charity is needed all around."

1. Underwood B J & Schulz R W. *Meaningfulness and verbal learning*. Chicago: Lippincott, 1960. 430 p.