4-1-2012

Goals and memory aging: Anchored self-set goals for list, name, and story recall

Robin Lea West  
*University of Florida, Gainesville*

Carla M. Strickland-Hughes  
*University of the Pacific, cstricklandhughes@pacific.edu*

Carla M. Strickland-Hughes  
*University of the Pacific, cstricklandhughes@pacific.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/cop-facpres](https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/cop-facpres)  
Part of the [Psychology Commons](https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/)

Recommended Citation  
[https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/cop-facpres/936](https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/cop-facpres/936)
Goals and Memory Aging: Anchored Self-Set Goals for List, Name, and Story Recall
by Robin L. West, Kimberly A. Smith, & Carla M. Strickland-Hughes

INTRODUCTION
Research on goal setting with respect to memory and aging has clearly established the following for list recall:

- Goals can be motivational for all ages
- People work harder for more challenging goals
- Age differences in ability impact goal-related recall gains
- Self-efficacy and related beliefs influence goal achievement
- Feedback interacts with goal success

Considering aging, older adults, as compared to younger adults, are less reliably influenced by goals to improve their test scores (West, Eber, & Hastings, in press):

- If demands appear to surpass their skills, older adults may withdraw effort from a challenging goal, resulting in weak performance gains in goal conditions (West & Thorn, 2001).
- At the same time, under relatively ideal conditions, older adults can be successful after goal setting, e.g., older adult scores improve when tasks are moderately difficult and goals are set by experimenters in relation to individual levels of performance (West et al., 2005; West et al., 2009).
- Past research also shows that older adults, but not younger adults, have difficulty setting their own appropriate memory goals (West & Thorn, 2001; West et al., 2005).

METHODS
Healthy, well-educated community dwelling Caucasian adults
- Older (N = 38) adult participants were more highly educated (p < .001) and had lower self-rated health (p < .001) than younger adults (N = 34)
- Tasks completed in group sessions
- Participants randomly assigned to goals or no goals groups
- In goals groups only, goals were self-set for 3 memory tasks, in relation to participants’ own baseline recall performance.

RESULTS CONTINUED
Self-efficacy:
- For those with goals, self-efficacy (controlling for age) was highly related to T2 performance for lists (p < .05), names (p < .005), and stories (p < .05).
- Practice-related gains in raw scores:
  - Younger adults gained more overall than older adults from T1 to T2 on all tasks (significant Age X Trial interactions, p < .001) as shown in the graph below.

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS
This is the first study to generalize previous goal setting studies on list recall to name recall and story recall. Goals led to gains for both of these new tasks, suggesting the value of future studies in this area.
- As expected, individuals who set the most challenging goals gained the most on the second trial.
- As in past studies with self-set goals, older adults do not show raw score gains across trials as high as those of younger adults.
- This is the first study to use anchors to improve goal setting by young and old. In general, older adults with anchors set goals that typically matched the goals of younger adults. Older adult performance was lower than younger adult performance at both T1 and T2, but gains (as a percentage of T1 performance) were comparable across age.
- Future studies could focus on how to train individuals to set personal goals that would enhance cognitive performance, across multiple trials with practice and feedback.

Poster presented at the Cognitive Aging Conference, 2012
Contact: west51@ufl.edu