Introduction

Prior research has investigated how various cues affect learners’ judgments of learning (JOLs; i.e., confidence judgments regarding likelihood of future recall, where 0 = no confidence and 100 = complete confidence). Rhodes and Castel (2008) found learners provide higher JOLs to items presented in large (48 pt.) font compared to those in small (18 pt.) font. However, there is usually no difference in recall as a function of font size. Sanchez and Goolsbee (2010) found that participants may have higher recall performance for items presented in small (8 pt.) font compared to large (12 pt.) font, suggesting that font size may differentially impact JOLs and recall performance.

We investigated whether there is a font size that yields higher JOLs and actually enhances recall performance. Four font size categories, each containing four different font sizes, were used. Half short and half long words were utilized to allow examination of whether word length would interact with the various font sizes to influence participants’ JOLs and recall performance, given that the two word lengths could be expected to require less/more real estate on a computer monitor. Courier font was used to ensure that each letter had equal space. Participants studied each word for 5 seconds before providing their JOL. Free-recall followed the study phase in each block. Block 2 used the same format as Block 1 with a new set of 64 concrete nouns.

We expected JOLs to increase as font size increased, given that larger fonts should seem more fluent. We expected recall to decrease as font size increased if smaller fonts inspired deeper encoding. We found JOLs were higher for long than for short words. As expected, JOLs increased as font size increased. However, recall performance only varied as a function of word length, with higher recall for long than for short words.

Method

Participants

- N = 32 (M age = 19.28, SD = 2.76)

Design

- 2 (Block) x 2 (Word Length) x 4 (Size Category: Smallest, Moderately small, Moderately large, Largest)
  - All manipulated within subjects
  - Word Length
    - Short: 4 Letters
    - Long: 7 Letters
  - Size Category
    - Smallest: 8, 10, 12, 14
    - Moderately small: 46, 48, 50, 52
    - Moderately large: 82, 84, 86, 88
    - Largest: 120, 122, 124, 126

Materials

- 128 Concrete nouns (64 per block)
  - Half short/ Half long

Examples of Stimuli

- Short: 4 Letters
  - 82 army
  - 126 tree

- Long: 7 Letters
  - 46 spatula

Recall for Word Length

Recall for each Size Category

JOLs for Word Length

JOLs for each Size Category

Discussion

- Long words and those presented in larger fonts yielded higher JOLs than did short words or those in smaller fonts, suggesting fluency affected the perceived memorability of words.
- Recall also differed by word length and font size, with long words and larger fonts yielding higher recall than short words and smaller fonts.

References