

# What is Verbal Memory and Short Term Memory?



The term “Memory” is used in casual conversation to generally describe a person’s capacity to recall, but in psychological communication may have a far more specific meaning. Not only do terms such as “Short Term Verbal Memory,” “Verbal Working Memory,” “Visual Spatial Memory,” “Visual Spatial Working Memory” and “Long Term Memory” all have different (though sometimes overlapping) meanings, they also tend to activate varying locations in our brains. So a parent who describes their child as having a “great memory” because they can recall every ride they went on at Disney World 2 years ago (Long Term Memory) , but is frustrated by their child’s lack of effort because he cannot seem to remember a 2 step direction (Verbal Working Memory) may be looking at 2 very different types of memory using 2 distinct portions of the brain.

Verbal memory involves recall for words, verbal items or language-based memory. Verbal memory is often considered to be a type of short term memory which reflects the ability to hold information as “active” or available in one’s mind for a brief amount of time. Short term verbal memory (STVM) involves three components: capacity, duration, and encoding. **Capacity**

refers to the amount of information a person can hold in their STVM; a typical rule of thumb is 7 items, +/- 2. This is known as Miller's Magic Number, and was proposed in 1956 when it was found that the average adult could store between 5 to 9 items in his or her STM. **Duration** refers to the amount of time that a person can retain the information in their STVM. Generally, STVM is thought to last between 15 to 30 seconds. Interruptions and delays typically disrupt the content in a person's STVM and cause them to lose the information. **Encoding** is a technique that is used to retain STVM, and may include mental or verbal rehearsal and repetition of the items.

STM is also closely related to Working Memory, where an individual not only needs to recall what they have just heard or read, but transform, manipulate or "work" on that activity. A child with STVM deficits may struggle in school and may have trouble learning or recalling simple skills. It is important for parents and teachers to remember that STM difficulties are not directly linked to general intelligence.

Testing to examine STVM includes simple memory tasks such as the Forward Digit Span tests of the WISC-V and the WAIS-IV. The AWMA measures verbal short term memory as does the Wraml-2 Word list subtest.

**For More Information On Short Term Memory, Look at The Links Provided Below:**

[Where are memories stored in the brain?](#) Interesting article that helps to recognize how many types of memory are stored differently in the brain.

<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/blog/2013/03/21/11-ways-to-strengthen-memory-in-a-child-with-special-needs/>

<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/10-strategies-enhance-students-memory>

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2657600/pdf/nihms84208.pdf>