

### Implicit Understanding of Memory Phases

While memory researchers generally consider short-term memory to be a system that lasts around 30 seconds in the absence of active maintenance, the idea of a period of remembering around a week may be consistent with what many lay people refer to as “short-term memory” in everyday conversation. To test this idea, 174 participants (108 female) on Mechanical Turk (ages 20 to 75;  $M = 36.5$ ;  $SE = 1.0$ ) were asked to provide an indication of what they believed the term “short-term memory” refers to in their everyday conversation. Specifically, their instructions were:

What we are interested in phrases that people use in their everyday conversation, and what people typically mean by them. Here, we are interested in the range of time that people are generally thinking of when they use the phrase “short term memory”. Examples of this would be people saying things like “Oh, I forgot. My short-term memory is not that good” or “I think I can keep that in my short-term memory.”

What we would like you to do is provide, in the box below, what you typically think of when people use the phrase “short term memory” in everyday conversation. Please enter a number (NOT a phrase, like “a couple” or “a few”), along with a unit of time (i.e., seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, or years).

The responses to this question ranged from 1 second to 6 months, and the distribution of responses is shown in the figure. The mean of these responses was 11.0 ( $SE = 2.6$ ) days<sup>1</sup>. If the most extreme response values (1 second and 6 months) are excluded, then the mean response was 4.9 ( $SE = 1.0$ ) days. The median between these two values would be around 8 days. This is in the general region of time when we think there is a shift from the t-LTM to LLM.

Beyond this consideration of the data, it should also be noted that the median and modal response was one day. This is consistent with the idea that there is a shift from e-LTM to t-LTM, and .50 of the responses were in the range of one day to two weeks. Thus, there seems to be a general intuition that memories move through phases, consistent with the Memory Phases Framework.

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<sup>1</sup> Clearly, ideas about the duration of short-term memory that are taught in university classes have not had a great impact on the population as a whole.

