

Reading skills practice: Super-recognisers – exercises

Super-recognisers have an extraordinary ability to remember faces. In the police force, this rare group of people can provide incredibly valuable information.

Preparation

Match the vocabulary with the correct definition and write a–j next to the numbers 1–10.

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|---------|------------------------------|----|---|
| 1..... | to convict someone | a. | (closed-circuit television) the use of video cameras in public places for security purposes |
| 2..... | a defendant | b. | recorded film or video |
| 3..... | a pickpocket | c. | someone who steals things from a shop |
| 4..... | to plead guilty | d. | someone who steals from a person, e.g. from their bag, without their knowledge |
| 5..... | a shoplifter | e. | someone who does something illegal |
| 6..... | a rioter | f. | (in a court of law) a person accused of doing something illegal |
| 7..... | footage | g. | to be officially accused by the police of doing something illegal |
| 8..... | to be charged (with a crime) | h. | to prove that someone is guilty in a court of law |
| 9..... | a perpetrator | i. | to admit in a court of law that you have committed the crime you are accused of |
| 10..... | CCTV | j. | someone who is part of a violent, uncontrolled crowd |



[1] Hundreds of angry people took to the streets in London and at least ten other English cities in 2011. Petrol bombs were thrown, buildings and vehicles destroyed and shops looted. Many of the rioters were caught on CCTV cameras, but most of the images were poor and the perpetrators had covered their faces.

[2] Gary Collins, an off-duty policeman, was watching the London riots on TV. He immediately recognised several people and cut his holiday short to help with identification. He ended up spending six months going through the CCTV film and managed to identify 190 people, many from their eyes alone. His help was of decisive importance in the investigation. Even with 200,000 hours of footage, facial recognition software managed to identify just one person.

[3] Collins is no ordinary police officer. Soon after joining the police force, he realised he had a special gift: after seeing a face briefly, he could remember it in detail years later. He is what is known as a super-recogniser. This term was first used in 2009 when a study estimated that 1–2 per cent of the population have severe problems recognising faces – called prosopagnosia or ‘face-blindness’ – and another 1–2 per cent are exceptionally good at it. They can recall up to 95 per cent of faces they see, whereas an average person remembers about 20 per cent.

[4] London’s Metropolitan Police set up a unit of super-recognisers in 2015 after Collins’ success proved it could be useful. It is the first of its kind in the world. Detective Chief Inspector Mick Neville of Scotland Yard, one of its founders, had realised that there was a problem with CCTV back in 2008. CCTV film was not used efficiently in the courts and did not seem to work as an effective deterrent. If criminals were captured on film, they knew they were unlikely to be recognised.

[5] Neville’s unit has changed all that. Since it started, the tiny team of six officers has made nearly a quarter of all identifications in London, mainly by spending hours scanning film and photos. This is impressive, considering that there are 32,000 police officers in the city. The team’s success relies on the ubiquity of CCTV; there are thought to be more than four million cameras throughout Britain.



[6] This winning combination of human skill and technology has helped convict criminals from shoplifters and pickpockets to sex offenders and murderers. Offenders are very seldom convicted solely on the evidence of a super-recogniser, but it is used to direct investigations. Many defendants plead guilty when they realise they have been caught red-handed.

[7] Super-recognisers could be useful in many jobs such as security and passport control. Find out about *your* powers of recognition with the University of Greenwich test: <http://superrecognisers.com/>

1. Check your understanding: matching

Choose the best heading for each paragraph and write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

- | | | |
|--------|-------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1..... | Paragraph 1 | a. Making CCTV useful |
| 2..... | Paragraph 2 | b. From identification to conviction |
| 3..... | Paragraph 3 | c. The right man for the job |
| 4..... | Paragraph 4 | d. Are you a super-recogniser? |
| 5..... | Paragraph 5 | e. Disturbances across the UK |
| 6..... | Paragraph 6 | f. Big Brother is watching you |
| 7..... | Paragraph 7 | g. The limitations of CCTV |
| 8..... | Not used | h. A recently discovered phenomenon |

2. Check your understanding: multiple choice

Circle the best answer to these questions.

- What newsworthy event took place in 2011?
a. There were lots of violent political protests.
b. There were riots on the streets of London.
c. A lot of people tried to steal things from shops.
d. There was a wave of public disorder across England.
- When Gary Collins saw the riots on TV, he ...
a. realised he should become a police officer.
b. changed his holiday plans.
c. stopped his job for six months.
d. came out of retirement.
- How did Gary Collins manage to identify so many rioters?
a. He recognised people he knew personally on TV.
b. He spent many hours looking at images on CCTV film.
c. He has an exceptional memory for faces.
d. He had undergone special visual memory training.
- Which of the statements about the population is not true?
a. About 2 per cent can remember faces seen briefly for years.
b. About 96 per cent have an average memory for faces.
c. About 2 per cent can't recognise people's faces at all.
d. About 2 per cent have a near perfect memory for faces.
- Mick Neville thought there was a problem with CCTV because ...
a. there weren't enough cameras on the streets.
b. it was hard to identify criminals from the film.
c. the film quality wasn't good enough.
d. the police didn't have time to watch all the footage.

6. The super-recognisers unit is impressive because ...
 - a. it is unique to the world.
 - b. six officers have made as many identifications as around 10,000 of their colleagues.
 - c. the team have identified a lot of murders who were then convicted.
 - d. the team is incredibly hard-working.
7. Identification by super-recognisers is used to ...
 - a. help the police conduct investigations effectively.
 - b. convict all kinds of criminals.
 - c. prove guilt when there is little other evidence.
 - d. deter crime of all kinds.
8. In paragraph 6, 'caught red-handed' means ...
 - a. caught with blood on your hands.
 - b. caught with red dye on your hands (from security devices).
 - c. caught in the act of committing an offence.
 - d. caught in a very embarrassing situation.

3. Check your grammar: gap fill

Complete the sentences with a preposition from the box.

about	as	at	by	from
of (x2)	on (x3)	throughout	to	with

1. Many rioters were caught _____ CCTV.
2. Collins is what is known _____ a super-recogniser.
3. 1–2 per cent _____ the population are exceptionally good _____ recognising faces.
4. The unit is the first _____ its kind.
5. The team has identified many criminals _____ spending hours scanning film and photos.
6. The team's success relies _____ the ubiquity of CCTV.
7. There are thought to be more than four million cameras _____ Britain.
8. The winning combination of human skill and technology has helped convict criminals _____ shoplifters _____ murderers.
9. Offenders are seldom convicted solely _____ the evidence of a super-recogniser.
10. Find out _____ your own powers of recognition _____ the University of Greenwich test.

Discussion

Are you good at remembering faces?