Item-Specific and Relational Encoding are Effective at Reducing the Illusion of Competence

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**Author Note**

Correspondence concerning this article can be addressed to Mark. J. Huff, School of Psychology, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Dr. #5025, Hattiesburg, MS 39406, United States. Email: mark.huff@usm.edu. Study materials and analyzed data are available via OSF (https://osf.io/x9n4f/). Supplemental Materials have been made available at https://osf.io/svzg8/. This study was completed as part of the Honors Thesis requirements for EEC. NPM is now at Midwestern State University.

Abstract

Metamemory, or the ability to understand the capacities of one’s own memory, is important for learning. To investigate questions surrounding metamemory, researchers commonly have participants make judgments of learning (JOLs) at encoding, in which participants rate their likelihood of recalling the target in a cue-target word pair when shown only the cue at test. However, the associative direction of cue-targets pair can affect the accuracy of JOLs. Unlike forward associates (e.g., *credit – card*), in which JOLs often accurately predict recall, an illusion of competence has been reported for backward associates (e.g., *card – credit*), symmetrical associates (e.g., *salt – pepper*), and unrelated pairs (e.g., *artery – bronze*) in which JOLs overestimate later recall. The present study evaluates whether the illusion of competence can be reduced when participants use a deep item-specific or relational encoding strategy relative to silent reading. Across two experiments, we show that both item-specific and relational encoding strategies reduce the illusion of competence for backward and unrelated pairs while improving the calibration between JOLs and recall. Thus, item-specific and relational encoding strategies are effective at reducing the illusion of competence, with increases in calibration primarily reflecting improved recall from deep encoding tasks.

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Item-Specific and Relational Encoding are Effective at Reducing the Illusion of Competence

Successfully monitoring the progress of one’s learning at study is paramount for improving retention, as effective monitoring allows individuals to adjust their encoding strategies to maximize later retrieval (Nelson & Narens, 1990). To investigate questions surrounding the learning process, researchers commonly have participants make judgments of learning (JOLs) while studying material for a later test. When making JOLs, participants study sets of items (often cue-target word pairs) and are asked to estimate their likelihood of correctly retrieving the target word if prompted by the cue on a later test. Using this measure, researchers can assess various components of learning, including how participants decide which items have been sufficiently learned and how particpants adjust their encoding strategies when encountering different types of study materials. While JOLs can be elicited using various measurement scales (e.g., Likert scales, binary ratings, etc.; see Hanczakowski, Zawadzka, Pasek, & Higham, 2013), they are commonly made using a continuous 0 to 100 scale representing the percent likelihood of the target successfully being recalled at test (e.g., 100% = definitely would remember; 0% = definitely would not remember). The use of a 100-point scale is beneficial as it allows for a straightforward comparison between predicted memory (measured via JOLs) and actual memory (measured via test performance). Thus, JOL accuracy can be easily assessed by comparing JOL ratings with the percentage of targets recalled at test.

Several factors have been shown to influence JOL accuracy, including perceptions of identical cue-target word pairs as being fluent due to word repetitions (Castel, McCabe, & Roediger, 2007; Mueller, Dunlosky, & Tauber, 2016) or changes in font-size (Rhodes & Castel, 2008), increasing the time spent studying word pairs (Koriat & Ma’ayan, 2005), and changes in JOL timing (i.e., delayed vs. immediate JOLs; Dunlosky & Nelson, 1992; Nelson & Dunlosky, 1991). Importantly, both the direction and strength of cue-target associations (i.e., probability of a cue word eliciting a specific target as response; see Nelson, McEvoy, & Dennis, 2000) have been shown to influence JOL accuracy, often producing situations in which JOLs overpredict recall (e.g., the illusion of competence; Koriat & Bjork, 2005; Maxwell & Huff, 2021). The present study further assesses the relationship between associative direction and JOL accuracy by testing whether encoding tasks which emphasize shared or distinctive characteristics of cue-target pairs (i.e., item-specific and relational encoding, respectively) can improve the predictive accuracy of JOLs. Below, we begin by detailing the illusion of competence, including previous research which has sought to reduce this effect. We then discuss evidence suggesting that item-specific/relational tasks may be effective at reducing or eliminating this metacognitive illusion.

**The Illusion of Competence**

Interest in the correspondence between JOLs and retrieval is not new. In an early example, Arbuckle and Cuddy (1969) had participants study letter-number pairs (e.g., A-73) and predict whether they would or would not remember the pairs on a later test. Overall, the authors reported that participants correctly predicted later recall for an average of 67% of trials, leading the authors to conclude that participants generally had insight into how difficult each pair would be to remember and used their perceptions of difficulty to adjust their predictions accordingly. Subsequent research has consistently demonstrated a relatedness effect on JOLs, such that related cue-target pairs (e.g., *mouse – cheese*) receive higher JOLs and are recalled to a greater extent versus unrelated pairs (e.g., *mouse – onion*; e.g., Koriat & Bjork, 2005; Maxwell & Huff, 2021; see Rhodes, 2016, for review). Thus, JOLs are sensitive to cue-target relations, and participants likely use their perceptions of relatedness to inform the magnitude of their JOLs (see Koriat, 1997, for review).

While perceptions of cue-target relatedness influence the magnitude of JOLs, certain situations occur in which perceived relatedness is a poor predictor of later recall. For example, Koriat and Bjork (2005) differentiated between two types of cue-target associations which differentially affected JOL accuracy. First, *a priori* associations refer to cue-target pairs which are strong forward associates based on free-association norms (e.g., *credit – card, stork – baby*, etc.; Nelson, McEvoy, & Schreiber, 2004; De Deyne, Navarro, Perfors, Brysbaert, & Storms, 2019) and reflect the probability that a cue word would elicit a specific target as a response (e.g., *mouse – cheese* vs. *mouse – ?*). Separately, *a posteriori* associations refer to any *perceived* relatedness between cue-target pairs that becomes more apparent when words are presented together, rather than separately. While a posteriori associations have traditionally referred to weak forward associates (e.g., *article – newspaper*; see Koriat & Bjork, 2005), they may also include strong forward associates in which the pair order has been flipped (i.e., backward associates like *card – credit*, *baby – stork*, etc.). Thus, backward associates reflect a specific type of a posteriori pair, as their relatedness is only apparent when items are presented together. Thus, a posteriori pairs could potentially be weak forward associates, strong backward associates, or contain both types of cue-target relations.

To test the correspondence between JOLs and recall for both a priori and a posteriori cue-target pairs, Koriat and Bjork (2005) evaluated JOL accuracy when participants studied unrelated pairs, weak forward associates, and strong forward associates/a priori pairs (Experiment 1), a priori and a posteriori pairs (e.g., strong forward and backward associates; Experiment 2), and unrelated pairs, a forward associates, and semantically related a posteriori pairs that shared no forward or backward associations based on free-association norms (Experiment 3). Across experiments, all a posteriori pair types demonstrated an *illusion of competence* pattern in which JOLs exceeded later recall rates, indicating that participants overpredicted the likelihood that they would later recall the target word. This pattern was particularly robust for backward associates, as the cue word, when presented in isolation, does not ostensibly converge upon the studied target word. Thus, though participants predict that backward associates are highly likely to be recalled at test, recall of this pair type is typically much lower than predicted.

The illusion of competence pattern reported on backward associates is highly robust. For example, Maxwell and Huff (2021) demonstrated that this effect occurs on backward associates even after employing various manipulations designed to improve JOL accuracy, including experiment pacing (self-paced vs. experimenter paced) and JOL timing (concurrent vs. immediate vs. delayed). Furthermore, this illusion is not limited to backward associates, as it extends to other pair types which similarly appear related at encoding yet lack useful relatedness cues at retrieval. For example, Castel et al. (2007) found that the illusion of competence extended to identical cue-target pairs (e.g., *mouse – mouse*). More recently, Maxwell and Huff (2021) reported the illusion also extends to symmetrical cue-target pairs (e.g., *on – off*), even after controlling for lexical characteristics which affect recall (i.e., frequency, concreteness, length, etc.). Unlike forward and backward associates, symmetrical associates contain cue-target associations which are equivalent in both directions (i.e., *on – off* would have approximately the same associative strength as *off – on*). Because symmetrical associates contain both forward and backward associations, they contain equal levels of a priori and a posteriori association. Taken together, these findings suggest that the illusion of competence is highly persistent, as simply the presence of a posteriori associations is sufficient to trigger the illusion of competence.

Because the illusion of competence represents a misalignment between memory and metamemory systems, researchers have sought to reduce or eliminate this pattern of memory overestimation by making JOLs more predictive of later memory performance. For example, Koriat and Bjork (2006) found that memory overestimations could be reduced by informing participants of conditions at test (i.e., warning them about the illusion of competence). However, an alternative approach, tested in the present study, would be to have participants complete tasks at encoding which strengthen the cues that inform both JOLs and recall. According to Koriat’s (1997) cue utilization theory, JOLs are based on several types of cues, including intrinsic cues (i.e., inherent properties of the stimuli including frequency, imageability, and cue-target relations) and extrinsic cues (i.e., external factors including see study pacing and encoding manipulations such as deep vs. shallow encoding; e.g., Slamecka & Graf, 1978; see Koriat, 1997; Rhodes, 2016). The inclusion of deep encoding tasks that emphasize intrinsic cues would allow participants to assess cue availability more readily at encoding, potentially leading to modified JOLs and/or improved recall. This possibility may be particularly important given intrinsic and extrinsic cues may interact. For instance, if encoding tasks draw attention toward or away from intrinsic cues such as pair relatedness, JOL accuracy may be differentially affected. Furthermore, the effects of these tasks on JOLs and recall would likely differ based on pre-existing cue-target relations. Thus, the qualitative features of how a study task affects processing of cue-target pairs may impact both JOLs and recall, producing changes in JOL accuracy.

**Item-Specific/Relational Processing on Memory Performance**

Memory researchers have long known that certain study tasks are more successful at improving retention relative to others. For example, the levels-of-processing (LOP) framework classifies tasks that promote memory via elaborative processing as “deep” tasks, while less beneficial tasks that focus on surface or perceptual features of study items constitute “shallow” tasks (Craik & Lockhart, 1972; Craik, 2002). Several deep tasks have been identified and shown to improve retention, including generation (Slamecka & Graf, 1978), production (MacLeod, Gopie, Hourihan, Neary, & Ozubko, 2010), and survival processing (Nairne, Thompson, & Pandeirada, 2007). Deep encoding tasks can be further divided based on the task’s propensity to encourage the processing of item-specific or relational features of study pairs (i.e., the item-specific/relational framework; Einstein & Hunt, 1980; Hunt & Einstein, 1981). Based on this framework, encoding tasks differ in the likelihood that they encourage participants to process unique features of study items (i.e., item-specific processing) or shared characteristics of study items (i.e., relational processing). Thus, both item-specific and relational processing qualitatively affect encoding strategies by changing how information is encoded in memory.

Previous research has found differential memory benefits for item-specific and relational encoding tasks. For example, McCurdy, Sklenar, Frankenstein, and Leshikar (2020) showed that relational processing facilitated the generation effect for lower-constraint tasks (i.e., generating a target word in the presence of a cue), potentially because participants had to create a relationship between the two words. Relational processing could therefore be beneficial in studying unrelated word pairs, as participants would be directed to create their own connections between items. Separately, Huff and Bodner (2014) found that item-specific tasks were more successful at improving recall and recognition when studying strong versus weakly related items. Relational tasks, however, were more beneficial for weak versus strongly related items. Thus, tasks which affect processing of extrinsic mnemonic cues can interact with the intrinsic mnemonic cues of the study materials (e.g., Mulligan, 2011). Collectively then, despite a general classification of item-specific and relational tasks as promoting “deep” processing in the LOP framework, their relative memory benefits are affected by the association between study materials (see Huff & Bodner, 2014, for discussion).

While it is evident that deep encoding tasks benefit memory, few studies have assessed whether these tasks similarly benefit JOL accuracy. However, in a recent exception, Tekin and Roediger (2020; Experiment 3) compared the effects of deep encoding (pleasantness ratings) shallow encoding (vowel-counting) on recognition memory. Critically, half of their participants also provided JOLs at encoding, allowing for a comparison of JOLs within the context of deep and shallow encoding tasks. While the focus of their study was on JOL reactivity (i.e., changes in memory due to providing JOLs) rather than changes in accuracy, deep encoding enhanced correct recognition without affecting the magnitude of JOLs. Thus, Tekin and Roediger’s findings suggest that deep encoding tasks may be effective at reducing the illusion of competence by increasing memory performance relative to JOLs (i.e., boosting memory performance to be more aligned with predicted memory).

Because the illusion of competence is contingent on cue-target associations, item-specific and relational encoding tasks may be particularly effective at influencing the correspondence between JOLs and recall, given the different effects of these tasks that are reported as a function of pair relatedness (e.g., Huff & Bodner, 2014). As such, the present study tests this possibility within the context of cued-recall testing (vs. recognition), while also investigating potential interactive effects between JOL accuracy and associative direction. In doing so, the present study provides a novel approach towards reducing the illusion of competence, as to date, no study has directly investigated the effects of item-specific and relational strategies on JOL accuracy.

**The Present Study**

Given the interactive benefits of item-specific and relational encoding on different associative materials (e.g., Huff & Bodner, 2014), the present study tested whether these encoding strategies could facilitate the correspondence between JOLs and recall, particularly on backward associates and unrelated pairs in which the illusion of competence is strongest (Koriat & Bjork, 2005; Maxwell & Huff, 2021). In doing so, we assessed changes in JOL accuracy for groups of participants who studied forward, backward, and symmetrical paired associates and unrelated cue-target pairs and made JOLs while engaging in item-specific encoding, relational encoding, or silent reading. Specifically, assessed whether the use of item-specific/relational strategies would benefit JOL calibration (i.e., *absolute accuracy* or the degree of match between predicted recall as measured via JOLs and actual recall at test) relative to reading. While JOL accuracy can also be described in terms of resolution (i.e., *relative accuracy* or the degree to which JOLs discriminate between what is and is not remembered; see Rhodes, 2016), the present study focused specifically on changes in calibration, as previous research on the illusion of competence has often framed this illusion as a miscalibration between JOLs and recall (e.g., Castel et al., 2007; Koriat & Bjork, 2005; Maxwell & Huff, 2021).

Finally, because of our interest in the effects of item-specific/relational encoding on JOL calibration, each experiment additionally included a set of calibration plots modeled after Maxwell and Huff (2021) which assessed changes in calibration across each item type as a function of encoding strategy by visualizing changes in mean recall at various JOL increments (see also Dunlosky & Nelson, 1992; Nelson & Dunlosky, 1991). Commonly, these plots use JOL increments of 10, allowing for a comparison across 11 total levels (i.e., 0 – 100 in multiples of 10). By including calibration plotsalongside traditional mean analyses, researchers can easily assess whether JOLs are over or underconfident and, importantly, detect whether metacognitive illusions like the illusion of competence uniformly affect recall at all JOL levels or whether calibration is greater for high JOL ratings versus low ratings. Our use of calibration plots, therefore, provides a useful supplement to standard analyses of mean JOLs and recall rates, as these plots can detect qualitative changes in calibration that might otherwise be overlooked.

**Experiment 1: Effects of Item-Specific/Relational Encoding on JOL Accuracy**

The goal of Experiment 1 was to test whether having participants complete item-specific or relational tasks at encoding would reduce the illusion of competence observed on backward, symmetrical, and unrelated cue-target pairs by influencing participants JOLs, increasing correct recall, or both. Overall, we expected that relative to silent reading, having participants engage in item-specific/relational encoding tasks would reduce the illusion of competence by improving correct recall relative to the read control task, but that the relative reduction in the illusion of competence would depend upon the associative pair type. Specifically, because relational encoding encourages participants to generate associations between cue-target pairs, we expected that relational encoding would be especially beneficial for unrelated pairs where the cue is ineffective at prompting target retrieval. Separately, because item-specific (vs. relational) processing has been shown to be more beneficial to memory when pairs are strongly related (Huff & Bodner, 2014), we expected that the item-specific task would be most beneficial for improving calibration on related pairs and, as a result, would be most effective at reducing and/or eliminating the illusion of competence for backward and symmetrical associates. For forward associates, which typically do not show an illusion of competence pattern (Maxwell & Huff, 2021), we predicted that the item-specific task could increase recall rates higher than the initial JOL ratings resulting in a situation in which JOLs *underpredict* subsequent recall.

**Methods**

**Participants**

Eighty-eight University of Southern Mississippi undergraduates participated for partial course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to either the item-specific encoding group (*n* = 29), the relational encoding group (*n* = 31), or the read-only control group (*n* = 28). All participants were native English speakers with normal or corrected-to-normal vision. Sample sizes for each group were based on Maxwell and Huff (2021), and a sensitivity analysis conducted using *G\*Power 3.1* (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) confirmed that this sample was sufficient to detect a small-to-medium main effects and interactions (Cohen’s *d* = 0.28) or larger.

**Materials**

The stimuli used were 180 cue-target pairs taken from Maxwell and Huff (2021), which were generated using the University of South Florida Free Association Norms (Nelson et al., 2004). These consisted of 40 forward associates (e.g., *credit – card*), 40 backward associates (e.g., *card – credit*), 40 symmetrical associates (e.g., *salt – pepper*), 40 unrelated pairs (e.g., *art – lion*), and 20 weakly related, non-tested buffer pairs used to control for primacy and recency effects. Pairs were divided evenly into two study blocks, each containing 20 of each forward, backward, symmetrical, and unrelated pairs, and 10 buffer pairs, for a total of 90 pairs in each list. All participants saw both lists presented in separate study-test blocks, the order of which was counterbalanced across participants. Each list began and ended with five buffer pairs, with the other pairs randomized anew for each participant.

Pair types were equated on associative strength (i.e., forward associate strength (FAS) and backward associative strength (BAS) values) using the Nelson et al. (2004) free-association norms. Additionally, these pairs were designed to control for lexical and semantic properties that could potentially influence recall rates, including word length, SUBTLEX frequency (Brysbaert & New, 2009), and concreteness values derived from the English Lexicon Project (Balota et al., 2007; Maxwell & Huff, 2021). Further, both study blocks were matched on these properties. Thus, mean associative overlap and lexical/semantic properties were equivalent between direction types and study blocks. Finally, counterbalanced versions of the study lists were created that switched the order of the word pairs (i.e., *forest – tree* vs. *tree – forest*). As a result, forward pairs from one counterbalance became backward pairs on another and vice versa. Alternating pair direction allowed for greater control of item differences, particularly on forward and backward pairs, as the same items were used in the forward and backward directions across counterbalances. Pair order was similarly flipped and counterbalanced across unrelated and symmetrical pairs. Semantic and lexical characteristics for each pair type are reported in the Appendix (Tables A1-A2).

The cued-recall test in each block contained all 80 cue words from the studied pairs minus the buffer pairs which were not tested. The cue word was shown next to a question mark that had replaced the target word. Test order was newly randomized for each participant.

**Procedure**

The experimental procedure followed the general procedure used by Maxwell and Huff (2021). All participants completed the study individually on computers using *E-Prime* 3 software (Psychology Software Tools, Pittsburgh, PA). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three encoding groups. For each study group, participants were instructed that they would study a series of cue-target word pairs and that their memory for the target word in these pairs would be tested later with the cue word present. The cue word was always presented on the left and the target on the right. Participants were instructed to rate (via JOL) how likely they were to remember the target word if they were only presented with the cue at test. JOL ratings were made using a 0 to 100 scale, with 0 being “I am certain I WILL NOT REMEMBER the word pair” and 100 being “I am certain I WILL REMEMBER the word pair.” Participants were instructed to use the full range of the scale to help reduce anchoring at points on the scale.

For the read group, participants were instructed to study the word pairs by reading them silently to themselves. For the relational group, participants were instructed to study the word pairs by thinking about how the pair of words were related to each other. Relational participants were similarly given the example of the word pair “Cat-Turtle” and were instructed to think about how cats and turtles are both animals and can both be pets. For the item-specific group, participants were instructed to study the word pairs by thinking about how the words in each pair were unique with the example that for the pair “Cat-Turtle”, participants might think about how cats have fur, but turtles have shells and how cats are mammals, but turtles are reptiles. Item-specific and relational groups similarly completed their encoding tasks silently, and participants in both groups were instructed to use their respective strategies prior to making their JOLs. Participants only saw one type of task instruction. After receiving the encoding instructions, participants completed a ten-word practice set using their assigned encoding task. Following completion of the practice trials, participants were required to describe their study strategy to the experimenter in their own words before starting the experiment. Participants were then given their first block of word pairs to study at their own pace and provided their JOL ratings while the word pair was displayed. Finally, after studying half of the pairs, participants were presented with a quick reminder to use their respective encoding strategy.

Following the first study list, participants completed a two-minute arithmetic filler task which was directly followed by a cued-recall test. This test presented the first word from each pair, and participants were instructed to recall the target word from memory. Participants were encouraged not to leave test answers blank and to try their best to retrieve the target word from memory. After the first cued-recall test was finished, participants completed a second study/test block using the same encoding instructions as the first. Once participants completed the second study/test block, they were debriefed and granted participation credit. Participants typically completed the experiment in under 1 hour.

**Results**

Prior to conducting the analyses, study items that were missing JOL ratings or had ratings that were outside of the 0-100 range were removed. These responses were rare and fewer than 0.5% of items were removed. When scoring recall responses, test items that were skipped were scored as incorrect, and a liberal criterion for scoring correct items was adopted such that misspellings or pluralizations were scored as correct. All analyses were collapsed across block (analyses split by block are available in the Supplemental Materials; https://osf.io/svzg8/), and we note that the data patterns were similar between blocks. Partial-eta squared (*η*p2) and Cohen’s *d* eﬀect sizes were included for signiﬁcant analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and *t*-tests, respectively. For all analyses, a *p* < .05 signiﬁcance level was used unless noted otherwise. For all reported non-significant comparisons, we further analyzed the strength of the evidence supporting the null hypothesis using a Bayesian estimate (Masson, 2011; Wagenmakers, 2007). In this analysis, a model that assumes an effect is compared to a model that assumes a null effect. This process yields a probability estimate that the null hypothesis is retained (termed *p*BIC; Bayesian Information Criterion). The *p*BIC estimate is advantageous in that it is sensitive to sample size, increasing confidence in null effects reported. This Bayesian analysis is therefore supplementary to null effects detected using standard null-hypothesis-significance testing.

Mean JOL and recall rates as a function of pair type are reported in Figure 1. For completeness, all comparisons are reported in Appendix Table A3. A 2 (Measure: JOL vs. Recall) × 3 (Encoding Group: Item-Specific vs. Relational vs. Read) × 4 (Pair Type: Forward vs. Backward vs. Symmetrical vs. Unrelated) mixed ANOVA compared differences between mean JOL ratings and recall rates across pair types and encoding groups. An effect of Measure was found, *F*(1, 85) = 18.79, *MSE* = 694.46, *η*p2 = .18, such that collapsed across encoding groups and pair types, mean JOL ratings exceeded later recall rates (62.66 vs. 54.19). Next, an effect of Encoding Group was detected, *F*(2, 85) = 5.40, *MSE* = 814.98, *η*p2 = .11, in which JOL ratings/recall rates were significantly higher for the relational (61.44) and item-specific (60.12) groups relative to the read-only group (53.33). All comparisons differed significantly, *t*s ≥ 2.96, *d*s ≥ 0.78, except for the relational and item-specific groups, which were equivalent, *t* < 1, *p*BIC = .87. Finally, an effect of Pair Type was found, *F*(3, 255) = 766.58, *MSE* = 107.66, *η*p2 = 0.90, in which JOL ratings/recall rates were higher for symmetrical associates (74.22), followed by forward associates (72.29), backward associates (59.01), and unrelated pairs (27.55). Comparisons across all pair types differed statistically, *t*s ≥ 2.69, *d*s ≥ 0.17.

A significant two-way interaction between Measure and Pair Type confirmed an illusion of competence pattern across encoding groups, *F*(3, 255) = 56.94, *MSE* = 87.42, *η*p2 = .40. Collapsed across encoding groups, mean JOLs approximated later recall for forward associates (70.62 vs. 73.95, respectively; *t*(87) = 1.46, *SEM* = 2.33, *p* = .15, *p*bic = .77) and symmetrical associates (75.82 vs. 72.63; *t*(87) = 1.27, *SEM* = 2.56, *p* = .21, *p*bic = .81). However, an overconfidence pattern occurred for backward associates, as mean JOLs exceeded recall (69.96 vs. 49.24; *t*(87) = 8.32, *SEM* = 2.52, *d* = 1.17), a pattern which similarly extended to unrelated pairs (34.21 vs. 20.89; *t*(87) = 5.22, *SEM* = 2.59, *d* = 0.72).

Critically, a significant three-way interaction was also found, *F*(6, 255) = 15.56, *MSE* = 87.42, *η*p2 = .27, in which the magnitude of the illusion of competence differed as a function of encoding group. Starting with backward associates, reliable illusion of competence patterns were detected across encoding groups, though at different rates. In the read-control group, a robust illusion of competence was detected in which JOLs greatly exceeded later recall accuracy (68.62 vs. 37.78), *t*(27) = 9.44, *SEM* = 3.41, *d* = 2.19. For the item-specific group, JOLs also exceeded recall (69.55 vs. 59.01), *t*(28) = 2.16, *SEM* = 5.12, *d* = 0.58, though at a lesser magnitude relative to the read condition. A similar pattern was observed in the relational group, where JOLs exceeded recall, but again at a lower rate than the read group (71.55 vs. 50.49), *t*(30) = 5.41, *SEM* = 4.05, *d* = 1.18.

For forward associates, an illusion of competence pattern was not found for any of the encoding groups, with JOLs matching later recall for both the read group (70.04 vs. 65.23), *t*(27) = 1.32, *SEM* = 3.42, *p* = .19, *p*BIC = .69), and the relational group (72.96 vs 77.22), *t*(30) = 1.15, *SEM* = 3.86, *p* = .26, *p*BIC = .74. For the item-specific group, however, JOLs were lower than later recall rates (68.67 vs. 78.84), *t*(28) = 2.42, *SEM* = 4.41, *d* = 0.65—a situation in which JOLs underestimated later recall.

For symmetrical associates, the illusion of competence was moderated by encoding task. For the read group, JOLs exceeded later recall accuracy (80.22 vs. 64.85), *t*(27) = 3.59, *SEM* = 4.48, *d* = 1.06; however, for both the item-specific and relational groups, the illusion of competence did not emerge as JOLs were equivalent to subsequent recall rates (71.62 vs 78.24), *t*(28)= 1.41, *SEM* = 4.90, *p* = .17, *p*BIC = .66, and (75.77 vs 74.41), *t* < 1, *SEM* = 3.46, *p* = .67, *p*BIC = .83, respectively.

Finally, for unrelated pairs, the illusion of competence was observed in both the read group (24.78 vs 14.73), *t*(27) = 3.23, *SEM* = 3.26, *d* = 0.76 and the item-specific group (40.64 vs 14.35), *t*(28) = 5.71, *SEM* = 4.81, *d* = 1.56, as JOLs exceeded later recall. However, the illusion of competence was not found in the relational group (36.59 vs. 32.52), *t* < 1, *SEM* = 4.52, *p* = .35, *p*BIC = .78), indicating that relational encoding provides a unique benefit on unrelated pairs by improving the correspondence between JOLs and subsequent recall.

Taken together, item-specific and relational processing tasks were each found to reduce and/or eliminate the illusion of competence pattern, but these reductions depended upon the pair type studied. Both item-specific and relational tasks were successful at eliminating the illusion of competence for symmetrical associates and reducing it for backward associates relative to reading. However, the two tasks interacted with pair type—relational encoding eliminated the illusion of competence on unrelated pairs, while the illusion of competence persisted on unrelated pairs for item-specific encoding. The different task effects on reducing the illusion of competence appeared to reflect an increase in correct recall rather than an adjustment of JOL ratings.

To test this, we conducted a pair of Encoding Group × Pair Type ANOVAs on recall and JOLs, respectively. Overall, an effect of encoding group emerged for recall, *F*(2, 85) = 6.49, *MSE* = 919.34, *η*p2 = .13, with recall rates greatest in the item-specific (*M* = 57.62) and relational groups (*M* = 58.67), relative to the read group (*M* = 45.68; *t*s ≥ 3.13, *d*s ≥ 0.57), with the item-specific and relational groups being equivalent, *t* < 1, *pBIC* = .88. Mean JOL rates, however, were stable across the three encoding groups, *F*(2, 85) < 1, *MSE* = 147.50, *p* = .59, *p*BIC = .98, though encoding group interacted with pair type *F*(6, 255) = 7.27, *MSE* = 107.67, *η*p2 = .15. For unrelated pairs, JOLs were increased when participants used item-specific (*M* = 40.64) and relational encoding (*M* = 36.59) strategies relative to the read group (*M* = 24.85; *t*s ≥ 2.82, *d*s ≥ 0.73). Differences between the item-specific and relational encoding groups were not statistically reliable, *t* < 1, *pBIC* = .84. For related pairs, however, JOLs did not differ as a function of encoding strategy, with the exception of symmetrical associates in which mean JOLs were higher for participants in the read group (*M* = 80.20) compared to the item-specific encoding group (*M* = 71.65; *t*(55) = 2.49, *SEM* = 3.52, *p* = .02, *d* = 0.66). All other JOL comparisons involving related pairs were non-significant, *t*s ≤ 1.34, *pBICs* ≥ .76.

**Calibration Plots**

We further assessed the absolute accuracy between JOLs and recall for each pair types using a series of calibration plots (cf. Maxwell & Huff, 2021). To generate these plots, JOLs were first rounded to the nearest 10% increment, which resulted in 11 JOL bins ranging from 0% to 100%. For example, the 0% JOL increment contains the proportion of correct recall for items given a judgment of 0%, the 10% increment contains the proportion of correct recall for items given a judgment of 10%, etc. Mean correct recall for each JOL bin was then plotted. By plotting mean recall as function of JOL bin, these calibration plots allowed us to qualitatively assess whether the illusion of competence uniformly affected recall across JOL levels (e.g., Maxwell & Huff, 2021) and whether changes in the illusion of competence occurred as a function of encoding type (i.e., whether overestimations emerged at different JOL increments based on encoding instructions).

Figure 2 displays calibration plots for each encoding group as a function of pair direction. Plots are structured such that they include a calibration line denoting a perfect correspondence between JOL ratings and mean correct recall (e.g., a 40% JOL and a 40% correct recall rate would be perfectly calibrated). Overestimations are reflected by data points falling below the calibration line. Underestimations are represented by data points falling above the calibration line. These plots revealed important qualitative differences regarding specific JOL increments in which item-specific and relational encoding tasks start to reduce the illusion of competence pattern. For forward and symmetrical associates, where illusions of competence are generally not found, all encoding groups showed similar calibration patterns. For unrelated pairs and backward associates, the illusion of competence pattern emerged at higher JOL increments in the item-specific/relational encoding groups relative to the read group. Item-specific encoding was most effective at increasing the JOL increment in which the illusion of competence pattern was detected for backward pairs (> 80%), while relational encoding was most effective at increasing the JOL increment for unrelated pairs (> 50%), again demonstrating qualitative differences in how item-specific and relational encoding at improving JOL accuracy.

These patterns were confirmed using a 3 (Encoding Group: Item-Specific vs. Relational vs Read) × 4 (Pair Type: Forward vs. Backward vs. Symmetrical vs. Unrelated) × 11 (JOL Increment) mixed ANOVA. Overall, this analysis yielded significant main effects of Pair Type, *F*(3, 252) = 90.75, *MSE* = 1485.79, *η*p2 = .51, and JOL Increment, *F*(10, 840) = 24.97, *MSE* = 1805.17, *η*p2 = .23. Importantly, a significant interaction was detected between Pair Type and JOL Increment, *F*(30, 2520) = 6.93, *MSE* = 919.81, *η*p2 = .08, confirming the presence of an illusion of competence pattern. However, the interactions between JOL Increment and Encoding Group were non-significant, *F*s ≤ 1.27, *p* ≥ .19, *pBIC*s> .99.

**Discussion**

Experiment 1 tested whether item-specific and relational encoding manipulations could reduce the illusion of competence by improving the correspondence between JOLs and recall. Relative to the read-only control group, both item-specific and relational encoding strategies were effective at reducing the illusion of competence for backward and symmetrical associates. Furthermore, consistent with our predictions, relational encoding was also effective at reducing the illusion of competence for unrelated pairs. These patterns were confirmed via calibration plots, which provided qualitative information regarding the JOL bin in which overestimations emerge. For backward associates, item-specific encoding increased this bin relative to relational encoding and the read-only control group, while unrelated pairs showed a similar increase when relational encoding was utilized. Thus, our findings in Experiment 1 suggest that item-specific and relational encoding manipulations are each effective at reducing the illusion of competence by improving the calibration between JOLs and recall.

While Experiment 1 demonstrated that the item-specific/relational framework can effectively reduce the illusion of competence for backward and symmetrical associates and unrelated pairs, we note that given item-specific and relational participants applied their encoding strategies silently, we are unable to verify separately that these strategies were being appropriately and consistently applied. Several experiments have reported consistent item-specific/relational processing differences using this procedure (e.g., Huff & Bodner, 2013; 2014), however, we sought to confirm participants’ use of item-specific and relational processing though the use of a “think aloud” protocol. In this protocol, participants are not only instructed and required to practice their given study strategy, but also required to state aloud the item-specific or relational characteristics aloud for each word pair with an experimenter present to provide feedback. We therefore applied this procedure in Experiment 2 to ensure the application of item-specific and relation encoding processes while also providing a replication of Experiment 1.

**Experiment 2: Think-Aloud Encoding**

Experiment 2 sought to replicate item-specific and relational findings from Experiment 1 by verifying that participants were consistently engaging in their instructed item-specific and relational encoding strategy. In doing so, participants in the item-specific and relational encoding groups applied their strategies using a vocal, think-aloud procedure in which they verbalized their encoding processes for each study pair. Overall, we expected that findings from Experiment 1 would replicate. Specifically, both item-specific and relational encoding strategies were expected to reduce the illusion of competence, with item-specific encoding being most effective on backward associates and relational encoding most effective on unrelated pairs. Finally, because of the additional encoding due to participants vocalizing their encoding strategies versus completing the task silently, it is likely that the inclusion of the think-aloud protocol could further benefit to recall (i.e., a production effect; McLeod et al. 2010), but it is unclear whether this task would affect JOL magnitudes. To account for this possibility, a set of cross-experimental analyses which tested for differences in JOLs and recall rates between participants who encoded pairs silently (Experiment 1) versus aloud (Experiment 2) is reported in the Appendix.

**Methods**

**Participants**

One-hundred-two University of Southern Mississippi undergraduate students completed Experiment 2 for partial course credit. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three encoding groups: Item-specific encoding (*n* = 34), relational (*n* = 32), or the read-only group (*n* = 36), a sample size modeled after Experiment 1 with the constraint that each group contain at least 30 participants. A sensitivity analysis conducted via *G\*Power 3.1* (Faul et al., 2007) confirmed that our sample had sufficient power (.80) to detect small-to-medium main effects/interactions (Cohen’s *d* = 0.26).

**Materials and Procedure**

Experiment 2 used the same materials as Experiment 1 and followed the same general procedure with the following two exceptions. First, after receiving their respective encoding strategies, participants in the item-specific and relational encoding groups received additional instructions to vocalize their thought processes aloud during encoding. For example, a participant encoding the pair “mouse – cheese” with a relational strategy might state that these concepts are related because mice eat cheese, while a participant encoding the same pair with an item-specific strategy might instead state that these items differ because mice are animals while cheese is a type of food. Second, given the additional time needed for participants to implement this think-aloud procedure, Experiment 2 only consisted of one study-test block. All other procedures, including the practice trials and filler task, were identical to Experiment 1.

**Results**

Figure 3 displays mean JOL and recall percentages as functions of pair type and encoding group. For completeness, all comparisons are reported in Table A4. Like Experiment 1, differences between mean JOLs and recall were tested via a 2 (Measure: JOL vs. Recall) × 3 (Encoding Group: Item-Specific vs. Relational vs. Read) × 4 (Pair Type: Forward vs. Backward vs. Symmetrical vs. Unrelated) mixed ANOVA. An effect of measure was not found, *F*(1, 99) < 1, *MSE* = 981.87,  *p* = .59, *p*bic = .90), as overall, mean JOLs did not differ from mean recall (60.85 vs. 59.39, respectively). An effect of encoding group was found, *F*(2, 99) = 23.48, *MSE* = 749.85, *η*p2 = .32, as mean JOLs/recall percentages were highest for the participants in the relational encoding group (69.73), followed by participants in the item-specific (59.83) and read groups (52.12; *t*s ≥ 3.05, *d*s ≥ 0.73). Additionally, an effect of Pair Type was detected, *F*(3, 297) = 359.85, *MSE* = 181.82, *η*p2 = .78, in which JOLs/recall rates were highest for symmetrical pairs (73.60), followed by forward (70.15), backward (62.86), and unrelated pairs (33.82). All comparisons differed statistically, *t*s ≥ 2.04, *d*s ≥ 0.29.

A significant Measure × Direction interaction was also found, *F*(3, 297) = 22.64, *MSE* = 168.97, *η*p2 = .19, which confirmed the presence of an illusion of competence pattern. Across encoding groups, mean JOLs were underconfident for forward associates (66.58 vs. 73.72), *t*(101) = 2.59, *SEM* = 2.79, *d* = 0.38 but were overconfident for backward associates (66.55 vs. 59.16), *t*(101) = 2.54 *SEM* = 2.92, *d* = 0.35 and unrelated pairs (39.01 vs. 28.64), *t*(101) = 3.41, *SEM* = 3.08, *d* = 0.43. However, for symmetrical associates, JOLs did not differ from recall (71.22 vs. 75.99), *t*(101) = 1.68, *SEM* = 2.84, *p* = .10, *p*bic = .76.

Importantly, a significant three-way interaction confirmed that illusion of competence pattern differed as a function of Encoding Group. Beginning with backward associates, a robust illusion of competence was detected in the read group, such that JOLs greatly exceeded later recall (65.86 vs. 45.26), *t*(35) = 4.09, *SEM* = 5.20, *d* = 1.03. However, this pattern did not extend to the item-specific group, as JOLs and recall did not significantly differ (62.22 vs. 67.70), *t*(33) = 1.34, *SEM* = 4.26, *p* = .19, *p*BIC = .70. Relational encoding similarly eliminated the illusion of competence (71.92 vs. 65.73), *t*(31) = 1.28, *SEM* = 5.03, *p* = .21, *p*BIC = .71.

Regarding forward associates, no illusion of competence patterns emerged across any of the encoding groups. JOLs did not statistically differ from recall for participants in the read group (65.11 vs. 61.22), *t* < 1, *SEM* = 4.30, *p* = .35, *p*BIC = .79. Furthermore, consistent with Experiment 1, JOLs in the item-specific group were lower than subsequent recall (62.96 vs. 80.71), *t*(33) = 3.53, *SEM* = 5.24, *d* = 0.97. Finally, JOLs in the relational group marginally underestimated later recall (72.06 vs. 80.38), *t*(31) = 1.84, *SEM* = 4.61, *p* = .08, *p*BIC = .52.

The illusion of competence was again moderated by encoding task for symmetrical associates. Starting with the read group, JOLs exceeded later recall accuracy (74.32 vs. 64.06), *t*(35) = 2.27, *SEM* = 4.71, *d* = 0.60. However, item-specific encoding produced a noticeable under estimation pattern on this pair type, with JOLs below recall (65.13 vs. 82.52), *t*(33) = 4.03, *SEM* = 4.49, *d* = 0.96, while relational encoding produced JOLs that were marginally underestimated (74.19 vs. 82.44), *t*(31) = 1.80, *SEM* = 4.65, *p* = .08, *p*bic = .53.

Finally, the illusion of competence was observed on unrelated pairs for participants in both the read (28.58 vs. 16.99), *t*(35) = 2.71, *SEM* = 4.42, *d* = 0.64, and the item-specific groups (39.78 vs. 17.63), *t*(33) = 4.33, *SEM* = 5.33, *d* = 1.17. However, these JOL overestimations did not extend to participants in the relational group, as JOLs and recall did not statistically differ (49.84 vs. 53.29), *t* < 1, *SEM* = 5.89, *p* = .54, *p*BIC = .82), replicating patterns observed in Experiment 1 and providing additional evidence that relational encoding uniquely benefits unrelated pairs.

**Calibration Plots**

Figure 4 displays calibration plots for Experiment 2. Starting with related pairs, both item-specific and relation encoding strategies influenced the correspondence between JOLs and recall. For forward and symmetrical associates were generally well calibrated for participants in the read group, however participants completing the item-specific/relational encoding tasks greatly underestimated later recall, with recall approximating JOLs at only the highest JOL increments (> 80%). Consistent with Experiment 1, the illusion of competence pattern occurred at higher JOL increments for participants in the item-specific and relational groups relative to the read group. Furthermore, item-specific and relational encoding were equally effective at increasing the JOL increment in which the illusion of competence emerged on backward associates (> 70% for both groups), while relational encoding was most effective for unrelated pairs (> 60%).

These patterns were tested via a 3 (Encoding Group: Item-Specific vs. Relational vs. Read) × 4 (Pair Type: Forward vs. Backward vs. Symmetrical vs. Unrelated) × 11 (JOL Increment) mixed ANOVA. This analysis yielded significant effects of Pair Type, *F*(3, 294) = 67.33, *MSE* = 2191.31, *η*p2 = .03, and JOL Increment, *F*(10, 980) = 33.02, *MSE* = 917.76, *η*p2 = .03. Additionally, a significant effect of Encoding Group was detected, *F*(2, 98) = 6.07, *MSE* = 6404.05, *η*p2 = .11. Next, a significant interaction Pair Type × JOL Increment interaction confirmed the presence of the illusion of competence, *F*(30, 2940) = 8.56, *MSE* = 1433.22, *η*p2 = .08. The JOL Increment × Encoding Group interaction was marginally significant, *F*(20, 980) = 1.53, *MSE* = 2191.31, *p* = .06, *p*BIC> .99, while the three-way interaction was non-significant, *F*(60, 2940) = 1.11, *MSE* = 1008.06, *p* = .26, *pBIC* > .99.

**Discussion**

Experiment 2 tested whether our findings in Experiment 1 that item-specific and relational encoding strategies reduce the illusion of competence would replicate. Importantly, participants in Experiment 2 completed the item-specific and relational tasks aloud rather than silently, which allowed us to ensure that they were consistently and correctly applying their respective strategies at encoding. Consistent with Experiment 1, item-specific and relational encoding tasks each reduced the illusion of competence relative to participants in the read-only control group. Specifically, item-specific encoding was effective at reducing the illusion on backward and symmetrical associates, but not on unrelated pairs. Relational encoding, however, was similarly effective on backward and symmetrical associates while also reducing the illusion of competence on unrelated pairs. These patterns were further explored via calibration plots, which qualified these patterns. Thus, findings from Experiment 2 largely replicated patterns reported in Experiment 1, further indicating that item-specific and relational encoding strategies effectively reduce the illusion of competence. Additionally, the replication of these patterns provides additional evidence that particpants were correctly applying their respective encoding strategies in Experiment 1.

**General Discussion**

The goal of the present study was to reduce the illusion of competence by improving the predictive efficacy of JOL ratings on recall of forward, backward, and symmetrical paired associates, and unrelated cue-target word pairs. Previous research has consistently found that JOLs tend to be over predictive on unrelated and deceptive backward associates, resulting in an illusion of competence pattern (Koriat & Bjork, 2005; Maxwell & Huff, 2021). Because previous work has shown memory benefits when deep processing is used in conjunction with JOLs (Tekin & Roediger, 2020), Experiment 1 first sought to further qualify deep-processing effects by comparing item-specific and relational encoding—separate encoding tasks that promote deep processing. Experiment 2 was then designed to replicate Experiment 1 while also including a think-aloud procedure to ensure that participants applied their instructed encoding strategies.

Across experiments, forward associates did not produce an illusion of competence pattern within any of the three encoding groups. However, consistent with previous research (e.g., Koriat & Bjork, 2005; Maxwell & Huff, 2021), illusions of competence emerged for backward and symmetrical associates and unrelated pairs, though these effects were moderated by encoding task. Starting with Experiment 1, participants in the standard, read-only JOL group showed a robust illusion of competence on backward associates, which extended to symmetrical associates and unrelated pairs. Next, for the item-specific group, JOLs underpredicted later recall of forward associates (cf. Koriat & Bjork, 2005; Castel et al. 2007). The illusion of competence again occurred on backward associates, though it was reduced compared to both the read and relational encoding groups, a pattern consistent with our prediction that item-specific encoding would be most beneficial in reducing the illusion of competence for related pairs (cf. Huff & Bodner, 2014). For symmetrical associates, item-specific encoding eliminated the illusion of competence. Unrelated pairs also showed an illusion of competence pattern, though this was reduced relative to the read group. Finally, for the relational encoding task, the illusion of competence pattern was eliminated for unrelated pairs, but as with item-specific encoding, the pattern was only reduced but not eliminated for backward associates compared to participants in in the read group. For symmetrical associates, the illusion of competence was again reduced.

These patterns extended to Experiment 2, in which participants completed the item-specific/relational encoding tasks aloud. Both strategies eliminated the illusion of competence on backward and symmetrical pairs, and, consistent with Experiment 1, only relational encoding was effective on unrelated pairs. Furthermore, relative to Experiment 1, each encoding strategy was more effective, often producing underconfidence patterns in which JOLs underestimated recall. These patterns likely resulted due to the additional encoding afforded by the think-aloud procedure in Experiment 2, which further elevated recall rates relative to JOLs. Additionally, our finding that patterns in Experiment 1 extended to Experiment 2 suggests that participants were effectively applying their respective encoding strategies in Experiment 1, even when required to complete these tasks silently. Taken together, findings from both experiments indicate that both item-specific and relational encoding tasks improve JOL accuracy versus a read task, though their relative effectiveness depends upon the associative direction of the pair type.

Following our analysis of mean JOL and recall rates, we constructed a series of calibration plots which assessed differences in absolute accuracy between JOLs and recall for each pair type as a function of encoding task. These plots reflected qualitative differences in JOL overestimation between encoding groups, particularly for backward and unrelated pairs. Starting with Experiment 1, read group participants were overconfident for unrelated pairs at all JOL increments and for backward pairs at all increments above 50%, a pattern consistent with Maxwell & Huff (2021). Thus, overestimation was most likely to occur for pairs in which relatedness cues used at encoding were not readily available at retrieval, replicating previous work on the illusion of competence (e.g., Koriat & Bjork, 2005; Maxwell & Huff). For the item-specific group, participants were again overconfident for unrelated pairs at almost all JOL increments, but overconfidence of backward associates occurred at higher JOL increments relative to reading (80% vs. 50%, respectively). Finally, for the relational group, overconfidence for backward associates emerged at JOL increments greater than 60%, and for unrelated pairs at increments greater than 50%. Thus, compared to the read and item-specific tasks, relational encoding greatly improved participants’ abilities to accurately predict their own recall for unrelated pairs, suggesting that unrelated pairs are particularly benefitted by relational encoding strategies. Finally, across all groups, participants were generally well-calibrated for forward and symmetrical associates.

These patterns then extended to Experiment 2. Relative to the read-only group, item-specific encoding again improved the correspondence between JOLs and recall for backward associates and unrelated pairs, thus reducing the illusion of competence. Similarly, relational encoding was again most effective at improving calibration on unrelated pairs. Therefore, across experiments, item-specific and relational encoding strategies benefitted calibration whenever the target word did not readily converge upon the cue at retrieval.

Although the present study is the first to employ the item-specific/relational framework to improve JOL accuracy, we note that Senkova and Otani (2021) compared recall performance for words receiving JOLs relative to lists studied using two item-specific encoding tasks (pleasantness ratings and single-mental imagery) that did not provide concurrent JOLs. Overall, neither item-specific encoding task increased recall relative to JOLs on either related or unrelated word lists. However, compared to a read-only control task that did not provide JOLs, both JOLs and item-specific encoding tasks boosted correct recall, leading the authors to conclude that the act of providing JOLs at study recruits item-specific processing. The present study, however, showed that when combined with JOLs, item-specific encoding strategies boost correct recall relative to standard, read-only JOLs. Thus, it is possible that item-specific encoding may produce an additional memory benefit when combined with JOLs. Of course, it is important to note that the test type differed between Senkova and Otani and our experiment (free-recall vs. cued-recall), so it is unknown whether the benefit of JOLs combined with item-specific encoding compared to JOLs alone would occur using other test types.

Finally, we note that our results complement work by Tekin and Roediger (2020), who showed that JOLs facilitated recognition memory for levels-of-processing (LOP) encoding tasks. Specifically, JOLs were particularly beneficial to memory when participants engaged in them alongside shallow encoding tasks (e.g., an e-counting task), such that the LOP effect (i.e., memory benefits of deep vs. shallow encoding; see Craik & Lockhart, 1972) was eliminated. While the present study was not designed to test the separate effects of JOLs on memory (i.e., JOL reactivity; Maxwell & Huff, 2022; Rivers, Janes, & Dunlosky, 2021; Soderstrom, Clark, Halamish, & Bjork, 2015) or specifically test recall within the LOP framework as we did not include a shallow encoding group, we note that both item-specific and relational encoding strategies constitute deep-encoding tasks. Our finding that recall was greater when participants combined JOLs with these encoding strategies relative to making JOLs alone is consistent with previous research on the benefits item-specific/relational strategies (e.g., Hunt & Einstein, 1981) and, furthermore, suggests that Tekin and Roediger’s findings may extend to cued recall. However, given that the present study did not include control groups who only engaged in only item-specific or relational encoding without also making JOLs, more research will be needed to test the potential for additivity with JOLs. Regardless, however, the benefits of item-specific/relational encoding appear to interact with different types of associative pairs which indicates that there may be boundaries in which relational and item-specific encoding tasks can reduce illusions of competence.

Taken together, our findings that item-specific and relational encoding strategies consistently reduced the illusion of competence via improved recall are consistent with previous research suggesting that these tasks primarily modify recall without affecting the magnitude of JOLs (e.g., Tekin & Roediger, 2020). Based on a cue-utilization account (e.g., Koriat, 1997), it is somewhat surprising that these tasks did not also modify JOLs, particularly given that relational encoding tasks emphasize pre-existing relatedness cues which form the basis of participants’ JOLs. We note, however, that in both experiments, item-specific and relational encoding tasks each increased JOLs for unrelated pairs, though the magnitude of JOLs for related cue-target pairs remained unchanged. Thus, when pairs contain pre-existing relations, the use of additional encoding strategies provide little benefit on intrinsic cues, particularly when cue-target relations are strong. Alternatively, when participants are required to complete these tasks when studying pairs with weak intrinsic cues (e.g., unrelated pairs), JOLs are increased, as the additional retrieval cues afforded by the item-specific/relational encoding tasks likely enhance participants’ predictions of later memory. Thus, future JOL studies may wish to explore the interactive effects of item-specific and relational encoding strategies and cue-target relations on JOL accuracy.

**Conclusion**

The present study found that the illusion of competence can be reduced when participants are directed to engage in item-specific or relational strategies at encoding. Across experiments, we found that the illusion of competence for backward and symmetrical associates can be reduced via item-specific encoding and that overestimation of unrelated pairs is reduced when participants use a relational encoding strategy. Calibration plots revealed that item-specific and relational encoding tasks generally improved the correspondence between JOLs and recall across pair types. Thus, item-specific and relational tasks can be used to reduce, but not eliminate, the illusion of competence for backward, symmetrical, and unrelated word pairs which appears to be the product of enhanced calibration between JOLs and subsequent recall.

**Open Practices Statement**

The data for all experiments have been made available at https://osf.io/x9n4f/. Neither experiment was pre-registered.

**Compliance with Ethical Standards:**

The studies reported were approved by the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board (Protocol #IRB-18-15) and found to be in accordance with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration ethical principles. Informed consent was obtained from all individuals who participated in this study. The authors report no competing interests.

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*Figure 1.* Mean JOL and recall rates as a function of pair type in the Item-Specific group (top panel), Relational group (middle panel), and the Read group (bottom panel) in Experiment 2. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Chart

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*Figure 2.* Calibration plots as a function of pair direction in the Read Group (top panel), Item-Specific Group (middle panel), and Relational Group (bottom panel) in Experiment 1. Dashed lines indicate perfect calibration between JOL ratings and proportion of correct cued recall. Overconfidence is represented by points falling below the calibration line. Data were smoothed over three adjacent JOL ratings. Bars represent 95% confidence interval.



*Figure 3* Mean JOL and recall rates as a function of pair type in the Item-Specific group (top panel), Relational group (middle panel), and the Read group (bottom panel) in Experiment 2. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

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*Figure 4.* Calibration plots as a function of pair direction in the Read Group (top panel), Item-Specific Group (middle panel), and Relational Group (bottom panel) in Experiment 2. Dashed lines indicate perfect calibration between JOL ratings and proportion of correct cued recall. Overconfidence is represented by points falling below the calibration line. Data were smoothed over three adjacent JOL ratings. Bars represent 95% confidence interval.

**Appendix**

[SHORT PARAGRAPH INTRODUCING RESOLUTION]

**Experiment 1: Resolution**

WA5

**Experiment 2: Resolution**

Next, wA6

**Cross-Experimental Analysis**

Because participants in the item-specific and relational encoding groups in Experiment 2 were required to verbalize their encoding processes, it is possible that this procedure affected the magnitude of the JOLs and/or their recall performance. We tested this possibility using a 2 (Experiment) × 2 (Measure: JOL vs. Recall) × 3 (Encoding Group: Item-Specific vs. Relational vs. Read) × 4 (Pair Type: Forward vs. Backward vs. Symmetrical vs. Unrelated) mixed ANOVA. The only reliable interaction that emerged was the Experiment × Measure × Direction interaction, *F*(3, 552) = 3.94, *MSE* = 128.35, *η*p2 = .02. All other interactions with Experiment, including the four-way interaction, were non-significant, *F*s ≤ 2.02 *p*s ≥ .06, *p*bics ≥ .64.

Overall, collapsed across encoding groups, mean JOL ratings did not differ between Experiments 1 and 2 for forward pairs (70.23 vs. 66.58, respectively), *t*(188) = 1.67, *SEM* = 2.23, *p* = .10, *p*bic = .77, or backward pairs (69.26 vs. 66.55), *t*(188) = 1.19, *SEM* = 2.29, *p* = .24 *p*bic = .87. For symmetrical pairs, JOLs in Experiment 1 were marginally greater than Experiment 2 (75.35 vs. 71.22), *t*(188) = 1.81, *SEM* = 2.32, *p* = .07 *p*bic = .73, while JOLs for unelated pairs were marginally lower in Experiment 1 relative to Experiment 2 (33.69 vs. 39.01), *t*(188) = 1.81, *SEM* = 2.94, *p* = .07 *p*bic = .72. Thus, across pair types, having participants engage in the think-aloud procedure in Experiment 2 did not affect their JOLs.

Regarding recall, no differences emerged between experiments for forward pairs (73.92 vs. 73.72), *t* < 1, *SEM* = 2.87, *p* = .92 *p*bic = .93, or symmetrical pairs (72.70 vs. 75.99), *t*(188) = 1.22, *SEM* = 2.64, *p* = .22 *p*bic = .87. However, for backward pairs, recall was greater in Experiment 2 than Experiment 1 for backward pairs (49.27 vs. 59.16), *t*(188) = 3.01, *SEM* = 3.33, *d* = 0.44, and unrelated pairs (20.91 vs. 28.64), *t*(188) = 2.27, *SEM* = 3.41, *d* = 0.33. Thus, the additional encoding afforded by the think-aloud task boosted recall, but only for more challenging backward and unrelated pairs. Importantly however, the item-specific and relational encoding effects produced similar effects on reducing the illusion of competence on both experiments, demonstrating that participants were indeed applying item-specific and relational processing tasks effectively in Experiment 1 when encoding was completed silently.

Additionally, we examined experiment differences in calibration plots and resolution. First, cross-experimental differences in calibration plots were assessed via a 2 (Experiment) × 3 (Encoding Group: Item-Specific vs. Relational vs. Read) × 4 (Pair Type: Forward vs. Backward vs. Symmetrical vs. Unrelated) × 11 (JOL Increment) mixed ANOVA. Overall, this analysis yielded a significant Experiment × Pair Type interaction, *F*(3, 546) = 12.57, *MSE* = 1640.37, *η*p2 = .12. However, all other interactions, including the four-way interaction, failed to reach significance, *F*s ≤ 1.69, *p*s ≥ .08, *p*bics > .99. Regarding resolution, a 2 (Experiment) 3 × (Encoding Group: Item-Specific vs. Relational vs Read) × 4 (Pair Type: Forward vs. Backward vs. Symmetrical vs. Unrelated) mixed ANOVA confirmed that mean *G* did not differ as a function of experiment, as no interactions with Experiment were detected, *F*s ≤ 1.72, *p*s ≥ .16, *p*bics > .99. Thus, changes in calibration and resolution across pair types/encoding groups did not differ between experiments.

Table A1

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Condition | Variable | *M* | *SD* | *Min.* | *Max.* |
| Forward | FAS | .37 | .21 | .05 | .81 |
|  | BAS | .00 | .00 | .00 | .00 |
| Backward | FAS | .00 | .00 | .00 | .00 |
|  | BAS | .37 | .21 | .05 | .81 |
| Symmetrical | FAS | .19 | .13 | .01 | .46 |
|  | BAS | .19 | .13 | .02 | .52 |

*Mean Associative Strength Summary Statistics Forward, Backward, and Symmetrical Pairs.*

*Note.* FAS (forward associative strength) and BAS (backward associative strength) values for unrelated pairs as these items share zero associative overlap.

Table A2

*Summary Statistics for Cue and Target Concreteness, Length, and Frequency Item Properties as a Function of Pair Type.*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pair Type | Position | Variable | *M* | *SD* |
| Forward | Cue | Concreteness | 4.97 | 1.22 |
|  |  | Length | 6.20 | 1.86 |
|  |  | Frequency | 3.74 | 0.67 |
|  | Target | Concreteness | 4.96 | 1.14 |
|  |  | Length | 4.46 | 1.27 |
|  |  | Frequency | 2.49 | 0.63 |
| Backward | Cue | Concreteness | 4.96 | 1.14 |
|  |  | Length | 4.46 | 1.27 |
|  |  | Frequency | 2.49 | 0.63 |
|  | Target | Concreteness | 4.97 | 1.22 |
|  |  | Length | 6.20 | 1.86 |
|  |  | Frequency | 3.74 | 0.67 |
| Symmetrical | Cue/Target | Concreteness | 4.70 | 1.38 |
|  |  | Length | 5.21 | 1.94 |
|  |  | Frequency | 3.23 | 0.67 |
| Unrelated | Cue/Target | Concreteness | 4.63 | 128 |
|  |  | Length | 5.21 | 1.52 |
|  |  | Frequency | 2.49 | 0.85 |

*Notes.* Frequency is measured using SUBTLEX word frequency measure (Brysbaert & New, 2009). Concreteness and length were taken from the English Lexicon Project (Balota et al., 2007).

Table A3

*Comparison of mean JOL ratings and correct recall percentages across pair directions for each encoding group in Experiment 1.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Encoding Group | Task | Direction | *M* | | *95% CI* | F | B | S |
| Item-Specific | JOL | Forward | 68.67 | | 5.95 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 69.55 | | 6.41 | 0.05 |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 71.62 | | 5.24 | 0.19 | 0.13 |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 40.64 | | 7.49 | 1.51\* | 1.51\* | 1.74\* |
|  | Recall | Forward | 78.84 | | 5.47 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 59.01 | | 6.85 | 1.16\* |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 78.24 | 6.05 | | 0.04 | 1.08\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 14.35 | 4.35 | | 4.75\* | 2.83\* | 4.42\* |
| Relational | JOL | Forward | 72.96 | | 4.86 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 71.55 | | 5.52 | 0.08 |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 75.77 | | 4.82 | 0.20\* | 0.29\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 36.59 | | 5.90 | 2.37\* | 2.15\* | 2.66\* |
|  | Recall | Forward | 77.22 | | 6.09 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 50.49 | | 6.96 | 1.44\* |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 74.41 | 5.94 | | 0.16 | 1.30\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 32.52 | 8.08 | | 2.07\* | 0.71\* | 1.95\* |
| Read | JOL | Forward | 70.04 | | 3.89 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 68.62 | | 4.39 | 0.13 |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 80.22 | | 4.20 | 0.93\* | 1.00\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 24.85 | | 5.68 | 3.44\* | 3.19\* | 4.11\* |
|  | Recall | Forward | 62.23 | | 6.96 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 37.78 | | 5.91 | 1.40\* |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 64.85 | 6.34 | | 0.15 | 1.64\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 14.76 | 3.96 | | 3.11\* | 1.69\* | 3.51\* |

*Note.* Mean JOL and recall rates for each associative direction condition across each encoding group. The three right-most columns indicate Cohen’s *d* effect sizes for post-hoc comparisons, \* = *p* < .05.

Table A4

*Comparison of mean JOL ratings and correct recall percentages across all pair directions for each encoding group in Experiment 2.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Encoding Group | Task | Direction | *M* | | *95% CI* | F | B | S |
| Item-Specific | JOL | Forward | 62.96 | | 6.87 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 62.23 | | 6.85 | 0.03 |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 65.13 | | 7.59 | 0.10 | 0.13 |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 39.78 | | 7.41 | 1.08\* | 1.06\* | 1.13\* |
|  | Recall | Forward | 80.71 | | 5.47 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 67.70 | | 6.26 | 0.74\* |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 82.52 | 4.05 | | 0.12 | 0.94\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 17.63 | 5.14 | | 3.99\* | 2.94\* | 4.71\* |
| Relational | JOL | Forward | 72.03 | | 4.76 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 71.92 | | 4.82 | 0.01 |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 74.19 | | 4.92 | 0.15 | 0.16 |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 49.84 | | 6.36 | 1.37\* | 1.36\* | 1.49\* |
|  | Recall | Forward | 80.38 | | 5.98 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 65.73 | | 8.31 | 0.69\* |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 82.45 | 5.39 | | 0.13 | 0.82\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 53.29 | 9.73 | | 1.15\* | 0.47\* | 1.28\* |
| Read | JOL | Forward | 65.11 | | 4.28 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 65.86 | | 4.15 | 0.05 |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 74.32 | | 4.50 | 0.68\* | 0.64\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 28.58 | | 5.84 | 2.34 | 2.41\* | 2.87\* |
|  | Recall | Forward | 61.23 | | 7.33 |  |  |  |
|  |  | Backward | 45.26 | | 8.19 | 0.67\* |  |  |
|  |  | Symmetrical | 64.06 | 6.60 | | 0.13 | 0.82\* |  |
|  |  | Unrelated | 16.99 | 5.94 | | 2.17\* | 1.30\* | 2.45\* |

*Note.* Mean JOL and recall rates for each associative direction condition across each encoding group. The three right-most columns indicate Cohen’s *d* effect sizes for post-hoc comparisons, \* = *p* < .05.

A5

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A6

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