Searching Under Cups for Clues about Memory: An Online Demonstration

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Abstract: An online demonstration, designed to enhance comprehension of Sternberg's (1966) short-term memory scanning task, involved rapidly searching under virtual cups for a ball (see: http://www.bates.edu/~tkahan/stm). We randomly assigned students to one of three groups, all of whom read the same textbook description of Sternberg's work: a demonstration group used three search methods to look for balls under cups (analogous to searching items in memory), a graphing control group used three methods to click on buttons (both groups had equivalent practice examining reaction time graphs), or a text-only control. The demonstration group outperformed the controls on an online quiz. We discuss ways in which educators can use this demonstration as a springboard for a more in-depth treatment of memory scanning research.