

Priming effects and recognition memory in young and elderly adults.

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[Experimental Aging Research](#) (impact factor: 1.31). 02/1986; 12(1):31-7.

DOI:10.1080/03610738608259432 pp.31-7

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ABSTRACT The present study explores the effects of age on the priming of alternate homophone spellings and recognition memory. Sixteen young and sixteen elderly adults were given a general information test, a spelling test, and a test of recognition memory. By embedding the less frequently spelled member of different homophone units (e.g., write vs. right) in the general information questions, certain of the homophones were primed during this task. The effect of this priming was assessed through the subjects' choice of spelling for these words on the spelling test. Recognition memory was assessed by asking subjects to indicate which words from a longer list were presented during the spelling test. As found in prior research priming effects were observed in younger subjects; however, no significant priming effects occurred in the older age group. On the recognition test, homophones were more often correctly recognized than nonhomophones, and priming affected the scores of the young negatively, but had no effects, positive or negative, on the elderly. These results suggest possible differences in the underlying bases of memory loss in aged adults and amnesics.