

Relational labels: A simple way to improve the likelihood of relational retrieval

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Abstract: The first step of successful analogical transfer is relational retrieval—retrieval that is based on common relational structure, such as an underlying principle or pattern. Unfortunately, purely relational retrieval often fails. Previous work has shown that schema abstraction via comparing two examples can improve relational retrieval. We asked whether labels that name relational structure might also promote schema abstraction and improve retrieval. Using a cued-recall paradigm, we varied the presence of relational labels at encoding and at test. We also varied whether labels were presented before or after the examples. The likelihood of relational retrieval improved (relative to baseline) when labels were given at encoding and test, and also when labels were given only at encoding. There was also a trend suggesting that labels were particularly helpful when presented before named examples. These findings suggest that one simple way to improve relational retrieval is through the use of relational labels.