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# The Role of Inhibition in Learning

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## Publisher Summary

Learning by definition involves the acquisition of knowledge. Inhibition, on the other hand, involves the reduction in accessibility of a memory trace. This chapter presents the evidence that, though seemingly at odds with each other, learning and inhibition are tightly integrated. Not only is inhibition likely recruited in situations that demand the resolution of competition, it also plays a significant role in situations that require the cessation of actions or processes. One can easily appreciate the usefulness of inhibition on a motor level. Inhibiting memory retrieval bears a strong similarity to stopping a motor response on a behavioral level, at least. Memory retrieval is not always as simple as following a straight path from a reminder to a target. More often than not, a given retrieval cue is related to many memories, only a subset of which are useful in a given situation. A rich body of research demonstrates a strong relationship between the number of memory competitors associated with a cue and the difficulty in successfully retrieving a particular target memory. The intrusion of inappropriate memories is distracting and often deleterious to the goals. Conceptually, one should be able to resolve the resultant interference through a combination of boosting the target memory's

signal and decrementing the strength of competing memories.

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