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7 Sins of Memory

Memory sin	Definition	Example from witness accounts
Transience		
Blocking		
Absent-mindedness		
Misattribution		
Suggestibility		
Bias		
Persistence		

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QUESTION

Sometimes what is a sin of memory in one context can be adaptive in another. Provide examples of situations in which each sin below could actually be adaptive:

1. Persistence

2. Bias

3. Absentmindedness

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7 Sins of Memory – Answer key

Memory sin	Definition	Example from witness accounts
Transience	Even well-formed memories are gradually forgotten over time.	Rebecca (the daughter): Too much time has passed to remember details.
Blocking	A memory that you know well is temporarily unavailable. “Tip of the tongue” syndrome.	Lula Mae (the cook): Can’t recall the dish she cooked the night of the murder, even though it was Rebecca’s favorite.
Absent-mindedness	Memories are poorly formed because we are too busy or distracted.	William (the butler): Because he was multitasking, he was too distracted the night of the murder to remember many of the details.
Misattribution	Memories are attached to the wrong person, place, or time.	Tierney (the friend): Confused details from the night of the murder with a TV show.
Suggestibility	False memories are formed, prompted by ideas from someone else.	Whisper (the boyfriend): Tierney planted ideas in his head during questioning.
Bias	Memories are influenced or distorted by beliefs, knowledge, and emotional state.	Ridley (the inspector): Ridley’s personal feelings toward one of the suspects (her niece, Rebecca) distorted her memory of the night (Rebecca leaving to go to the bathroom).
Persistence	Unwanted traumatic memories are recalled endlessly.	Rebecca (the daughter): She is haunted by memories of her father’s murder.

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QUESTION

Sometimes what is a sin of memory in one context can be adaptive in another.
Provide examples of situations in which each sin below could actually be adaptive:

1. Persistence

Memories that are associated with strong emotions tend to be well encoded, helping us avoid danger. A well-encoded memory of being bitten by a dog may help us be wary of dogs in the future.

2. Bias

Being able to generalize information means that we can connect new information to old information that has already been encoded in memory. This interconnectedness can allow us to very quickly get the “gist” of something. It also helps us generalize across similar situations, helping us learn how to behave in ways that are socially acceptable.

3. Absentmindedness

Attention helps us concentrate on important information and filter out unimportant or irrelevant information. If we formed memories of everything that happened around us, we would end up dedicating a lot of energy to irrelevant information.

For more information on the 7 sins of memory and how they can be adaptive, visit <http://www.spring.org.uk/2008/02/7-sins-of-memory-complete-guide.php>