

In Lesson 6 (Ch. 7), we discussed various ways that information can be represented in the cognitive system. One way that people comprehend, store, and remember information is through the use of situation models, which are like mental simulations of the events we experience. When people are exposed to a text that describes an event, information from the text is combined with prior semantic and episodic knowledge to create this mental model. The model then serves as a simulation of a real or possible world as described by the text. Comprehension, therefore, is a search for meaning. We actively build on the information presented in the text, we elaborate on it, we include inferences that we make, and we update the model based on new information that we encounter.

For this assignment,

1. Locate and read the research report:  
Situation models: The mental leap into imagined worlds.  
Zwaan, Rolf A.  
Current Directions in Psychological Science. Vol 8(1), Feb 1999, pp. 15-18
2. Answer the following questions:
  - a. Zwaan discusses situation models for stories. Do you think that we create situation models when we read other sorts of texts? Consider each of the following examples: a scientific article, a historical account of a civil war battle, and instructions for constructing a piece of furniture. Discuss each example and explain why we may or may not create situation models for these. Justify your response in each case and feel free to include other types of texts that would be interesting to consider.
  - b. Some researchers have suggested that the process in our minds that creates situation models when we read actually evolved for dealing with social situations. In other words, we create situation models to keep track of what others are doing in real life, not just when we read, and we often adopt others' point of view when we do so (e.g., think of a story related to you by a friend, family member, or co-worker—do you adopt their perspective as you are listening/comprehending/evaluating what they are saying?). From your own experience, evaluate this idea, ***paying special attention to those properties of a situation model that Zwaan says are important***. Use an example of a story or experience related to you by someone else in your evaluation and discussion.
  - c. Does our knowledge of situation models help us to predict what people will say is a well-formed story? Does it help us to predict what sort of story people will find surprising, exciting, or interesting? Explain your answer.