



10-10-2021

# Having a sense of purpose improves memory



By **Andrei Ionescu**  
Earth.com staff writer

New research led by [Florida State University](#) (FSU) has found a link between an individual's sense of purpose in life, cognitive function, and autobiographical memory. The study suggests that individuals with a higher sense of purpose in life experience more vivid autobiographical memories. While both a sense of purpose and cognitive function make memories easier to recall, only the sense of purpose seems to increase memories' vividness and coherence.

"Personal memories serve really important functions in everyday life," said study lead author Angelina Sutin, a professor in the [College of Medicine](#) at FSU. "They help us to set goals, control emotions and build intimacy with others. We also know people with a greater sense of purpose perform better on objective memory tests, like remembering a list of words. We were interested in whether purpose was also associated with the quality of memories of important personal



February 2020, before the onset of the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). Five months later, researchers measured participants' ability to retrieve and describe autobiographical memories related to the pandemic.

“We chose to measure the ability to recall memories associated with the COVID-19 pandemic because the pandemic is an event that touched everyone, but there has been a wide range of experiences and reactions to it that should be apparent in memories,” explained co-author Martina Luchetti, an assistant professor of Behavioral Science and Social Medicine at FSU.

Participants with a stronger sense of purpose reported more accessible, coherent, and especially vivid memories than those with less purpose. Moreover, they described more sensory details, spoke mostly from a first-person perspective, and reported more positive feelings related to their memories.

“Memories help people to sustain their well-being, social connections and cognitive health,” said co-author Antonio Terracciano, a professor of Geriatrics at FSU. “This research gives us more insight into the connections between a sense of purpose and the richness of personal memories. The vividness of those memories and how they fit into a coherent narrative may be one pathway through which purpose leads to these better outcomes,” he concluded.

The study was published in the journal [Memory](#).

—

By [Andrei Ionescu](#), [Earth.com](#) Staff Writer