

Spatial Anchoring – Stand In The Same Place To Anchor An Emotion

Stand

In the end, you'll still be you

One that's done all the things you set out to do

...

Stand

For the things you know are right

...

[Chorus]

Stand, stand (Stand), stand (Everybody, yeah, yeah)

Stand (Stand, y'all), stand (Stand), stand (Ooh, ooh)

“Stand” by Sly and the Family Stone (1969) - [STAND](#)

Can where I stand in a courtroom, if I return there again and again, anchor an emotion or value or message?

We all know that movement and positioning in a courtroom are important communication tools. You can “make the courtroom the bus” [or whatever location the case is about – see <https://law.temple.edu/aer/2017/11/25/bus-making-opening-statement-visual/>], walking to where the driver sits, then down the aisle to the passenger area, and finish in the back of the courtroom to show where the rear emergency door is. This lets you “show” the story you are telling, and you can return to those locations in witness examinations and closings.

And there is proxemics, the study of where you stand as a function of the power of your message, with being closer to the jury increasing the perception of the lawyer’s skill and persuasiveness.

<https://law.temple.edu/aer/2025/06/01/proxemics-closeness-makes-the-jury-grow-fonder/>

But what about location creating memory of an emotion or value? In the book **COURTROOM POWER: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGIES FOR TRIAL LAWYERS** by Paul Lesnik and Eric Oliver, the following was stated as a known truth:

Remember also that you can help embed meaning in jurors' minds during opening statement through anchoring...Use your hands and body to place truth and untruth in different locations. For example, when referring to the truth of what the jury will hear from your witnesses you can emphasize it by standing in a particular place or pointing to a specific place. You can bring the veracity of the testimony to be presented into question by moving your body or shifting your arms to a new location.

COURTROOM POWER, 161-162. The authors continue by claiming that once the anchoring is repeated across trial “[t]he jury will understand what is true and what is not just by watching your movements, as you repeat or trigger the anchor for them.” POWER, 162.

[It is around this point where a BRAIN LESSONS article turns to a body of research to support the thesis. But this article is different, so please read on.]

The suggestion in COURTROOM POWER sounds great. But there was no footnote to a body of research. So – is this “evidence based” advocacy lesson or intuitive and anecdotal? I set out to find out.

The journey began with messages sent to the authors of COURTROOM POWER, asking for any supporting research. Sadly, no reply was received.

I then turned to our colleague Charlie Rose, who gave a lecture about anchoring at a presentation several years ago. Charlie was immediately responsive and helpful. He recalled that Rafe Forman lectured about this years ago and then directed me to experts in psychodynamics and neurolinguistics programming. When I read their works I found no studies; when I tried to follow up with a communication requesting information, there was no available email or no response came.

I checked in with John Blumberg, author of the excellent work PERSUASION SCIENCE FOR TRIAL LAWYERS. John had heard of it “about 20 years ago when I took an advanced trial advocacy program and one of the faculty did a presentation/demonstration which I thought (and still think) was very interesting. In fact, I have included it in some of my presentations as trial school faculty for ABOTA.” But he too had no research.

So what research does exist? It is about anchoring in general.

First is the research on “context dependent memory.” Put simply, “memory performance may improve when individuals are in a context similar to where the event was initially encoded...[T]he ability to remember focal information accurately is significantly influenced by the relationship between the encoding and retrieval contexts.” Choi *et al* Context-Dependent Memory In The Real World: The Role Of Frequency And Context Dwell Time, *Frontiers in Psychology*, . 2025 Jan 28;15:1489039. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11810929/> In other words, the place where I am when I perceive something is important, and being in that place again when I am asked to recall facts enhances memory. Close, but not yet spatial location for the deliverer of the message.

A little more support came from a study on the hippocampus region of the brain. [Geva-Sagiv M, Dimsdale-Zucker HR, Williams AB, Ranganath C. Proximity to boundaries reveals spatial context representation in human hippocampal CA1. *Neuropsychologia*. 2023](#) As summarized by a research assistant from the Temple Law Library.

Participants viewed objects in VR and explored rooms that had objects in different positions, including near a boundary like a wall. When participants were asked to remember the objects, the researchers found that people were better at recalling the locations of the objects that were near boundaries. At the very least, the study concludes that physical location can become associated with memory.

So, with research showing only a general association between location and memory, I turned to an expert in communications study, Dr. Scott Gratson. <https://klein.temple.edu/directory/scott-gratson-sgratson> Here is what I learned.

We must go back to the foundations of delivery in the public sphere. The big two (no, I posit not Aristotle and Plato, which is blasphemy to some colleagues): Cicero and Quintillion...

The concept is that oratory moved from a podium to a stage. Yes (no offense to Law), the presentation moved from speech to performance, from a solid podium to a full stage with actors using that space.

Cicero's big thing was on the body accentuating oratory by connecting with audience. Yes, gestures do this. So do proxemics, which falls under cultural and interpersonal communication.

I should note, in perhaps a crass way, audiences look at the speaker like a bouncing karaoke ball: it lets them know when point one ended and the second point begins. The lawyer is thus an actor literally and figuratively positioning themselves as a new character and they personify a new argument. The speaker is giving a verbal outline with their own body. It's clearer to the audience. Of course, the lawyer knows the different parts of their presentation: they're giving it. The audience, however, has no outline notes; in some courts they may not take notes even if they wanted too! The speaker and their body combined is a memory device and guide (Latin: docent, a teacher by guiding).

When I asked for any additional (and contemporary) resources, I was directed to the work of Craig Valentine, who Dr. Gratson says “understands how to appeal to a variety of audiences. He is also absurdly charismatic. His edited book, noted below, compiles qualitative research and tips, but I'm not sure on quantitative methodology.”

I watched Valentine at <https://youtu.be/96AiJJnmys0?si=22Ev-M-lh0x27Xoh> and was impressed; and checked the book “World Class Speaking in Action” (2014). No quantitative research, but another endorsement of the idea that position conveys emotion/meaning.

Where does that leave us? A BRAIN LESSON devoid of direct science but with centuries of anecdotal evidence and some tangential supporting research. So maybe it is worth considering spatial anchoring to convey truth/untruth. But if you are going to do this, heed the advice from the Valentine-edited collection of essays – don't confuse where the message spots are. As described in one chapter, a student began a speech describing his uncle's demise, down to talking about being at the funeral and using a spot on the stage to show where the uncle's casket was. The only problem? Later in the same speech the student used the spot to depict where a picnic happened. Bob Mohl, Staging Your Presentation, in World Class Speaking in Action, Chapter 25.

As Valentine described this in the youtube lecture, the student had to be told
“Look, you just had lunch on your uncle.” So – anchor wisely *and consistently*,
but don’t have lunch on your uncle.