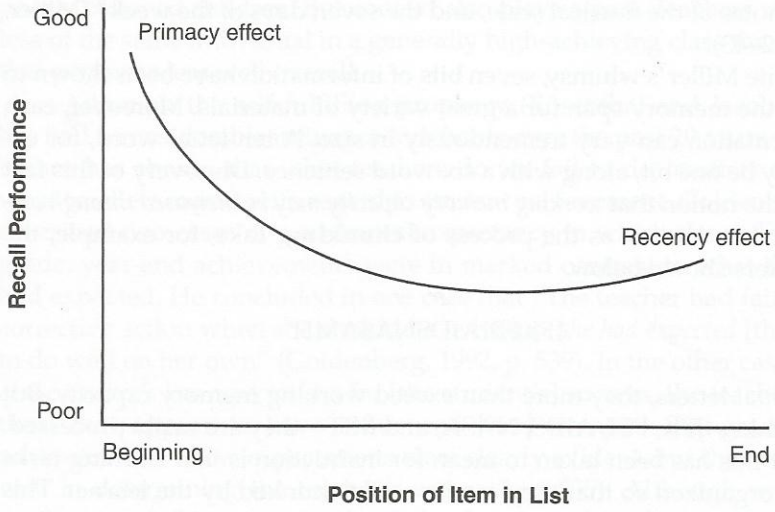

FIGURE 3.6 *Serial Position Curve*

In order to prevent the loss of information from working memory, and to ensure its being transferred to long-term storage, two processes are necessary: rehearsal and encoding.

Rehearsal

When you repeat a phone number to yourself over and over while waiting to use the phone, you are engaged in rehearsal. Some would call this maintenance rehearsal because the repetition serves to maintain the information in the working memory for some designated period of time. Once you have made the call and reached your party, you no longer have the need to maintain the phone number in the short-term store.

Rehearsal has been used to explain the primacy effect of the serial position curve. When items are presented as described earlier, but at a slower rate, subjects remember not only the last items on the list, but the first ones as well (Figure 3.6). You can imagine why. With only a few items in memory at the beginning of the list, subjects have time between items to rehearse all the items they have seen. As more items crowd in, however, the rehearsal task becomes more difficult, so that items in the middle of the list receive less practice. As before, items at the end are recalled well because they are still in working memory at the time of recall.

Whereas recency and primacy effects are ostensibly associated with short-term memory, there are anecdotal data to suggest that something similar goes on even after information should be in long-term memory. For ex-