

Our View of the World

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- Conscious awareness is necessary in order for people to operate within society and to make sense of the world around them.
- Conscious sensory experience is known as *perception*.
- It is our perception of things, situations, and ideas that determine how we see and interpret them.

What influences perception?

1. Bottom-up processing

Bottom-up processing involves the information that enters the brain through the senses.

2. Top-down processing

Top-down processing involves knowledge that an individual brings to a situation. This knowledge may come from facts, memories, expectations, and experiences.

Advantages and disadvantages of top-down processing

- Top-down processing may make it easier for us to recognize and label things. (It is most influential for ambiguous or partially blocked stimuli).

(Ex) When a teacher is trying to read a student's paper, if she is familiar with the topic and has experience reading that individual's handwriting, she is more likely to recognize the words and know what is written.

- It may lead to varying viewpoints and interpretations

(Ex) When a certain topic or idea is on one's mind, that individual may be more inclined to perceive things that coincide with that thought. (Do the activities below to better understand this point.)

Activities

Activity 1: Look at the picture to the right.
What do you see?

The ambiguous creature can be seen as a duck (looking off to the left) or as a rabbit (looking off to the right).



Activity 2: Now, look at the picture below. What is the character in the middle?



If we block out the 12 on the left and the 14 on the right, we see the middle character as a B. But block out the A and the C, it looks like a 13. Here, we again tend to see what the context leads us to expect we would see.

Practical Applications

Top-down processing clearly affects our everyday perceptions.

- It helps to explain why people are afraid of certain things.
 - Negative experiences with cats may cause some people run the other way when they see a cat.
 - Some people are afraid of driving due to recent accidents or knowledge of vehicle-related death rates.
- It influences how individuals react to certain circumstances.
 - Experiences and facts may help people to determine what actions to take.
 - Expectations influence peoples' responses.
- It affects how people see things.
 - Stories will differ in determining how a fight occurred depending upon whether a friend was involved.
 - Two people may claim to have seen something different in the same picture.

Activity

Activity 3: Read the sentence out loud or to yourself. Read it several times to make sure you have it right.



How many times does the word 'the' appear in the sentence? Did you see the extra word each time you read the sentence? Most people don't!