

## Editorial Comments on Cognition

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Accepted on February 26, 2021

### Editorial Note

What is cognition? The word comes from the Latin root *cognoscere*, which means “to know”. By cognition, we are usually referring to everything that is related to knowledge. In other words, the accumulation of information that we have acquired through learning or experience.

Cognition is defined as ‘the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses.’ The states and processes involved in knowing, which in their completeness include perception and judgment. Cognition includes all conscious and unconscious processes by which knowledge is accumulated, such as perceiving, recognizing, conceiving, and reasoning. Put differently, cognition is a state or experience of knowing that can be distinguished from an experience of feeling or willing.

### Perception

Perception or perceiving refers to the information we get from our five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste). Studies have shown that our human senses perceive or take in far more information or data than our nervous systems can ever process or pay attention to. We get around this by organizing this data into chunks or groups, so that when we see a new object (such as a new type of car), we automatically compare it against the vast number of patterns or concepts we already have stored in our brains. When we find that it matches a concept—since we probably already have a general idea of what “car” is, for example—we do not have to then process every little bit of detailed information about this new car to know that it is a car (that is, in order to perceive it or recognize and understand it as a car). At the end of this process, we have made a judgment of some sort about this new thing. Once scientists discovered this aspect of perception, they were better able to explain how people often see what they expect to see and are sometimes in fact mistaken. This happens when we take only that first, matching impression of something and conclude that it is correct (that is, that the reality is the same as the idea of it we have in our minds) without taking the time to check out all the details of a thing. However, this ability to conceptualize or to create concepts in our minds is very important and is one of the key functions or processes of cognition or knowing.

### Learning

Thorough knowledge or skill gained by study. Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1896–1980) spent a lifetime studying how children learn, and he identified three stages that children go through as they grow and develop. In the first and simplest stage, an infant believes that an object is still where he or she first saw it, even though the infant had seen it moved to another place. In the second stage, the young child knows that it is at times separate from its environment and has developed concepts for things whether he or she is presently involved with them or not. The final, more mature stage has the older child understanding how to use symbols for things (such as things having names) and developing the ability to speak and use those symbols in language.

### Memory

Memory, or the ability to recall something that was learned, is another cognitive function that is very important to learning. Scientists usually divide it into short-term and long-term memory. Our short-term memory seems to have a limited capacity, is very much involved with our everyday speech, and appears very important to our identity or our sense of self (who we are). Long-term memory stores information for much longer periods of time and seems to show no limitations at all. The three basic processes common to both types of memory encoding or putting information into memory, storage, and retrieval are exactly those used in today's computers.

### Language

The use by humans of voice sounds and written symbols representing those sounds in organized combinations to express and to communicate thoughts and feelings.”

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