



THE COGNITIVE APPROACH

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

An introduction to the themes of the cognitive approach to psychology

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Cognition -

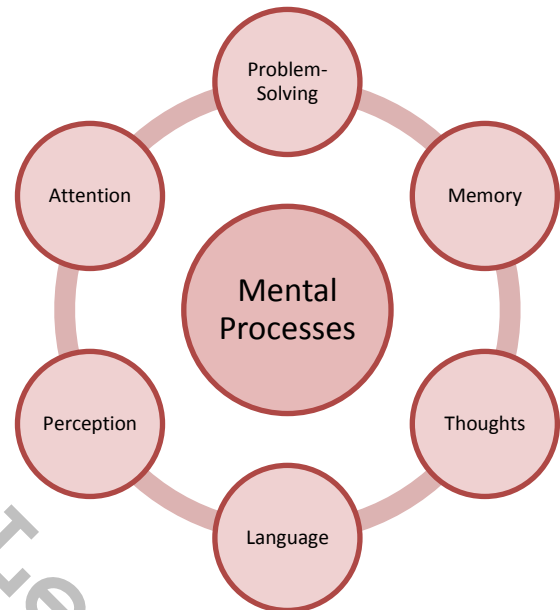
refers to all those processes by which sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered and used

The **Cognitive Approach** is the study of how we take in information from our world, organise it, and use it to help us function successfully. It is concerned with the internal operation of the mind, and seeks to understand the role of mental processes in determining human behaviour.

Research into cognitive psychology can have many benefits to society. The cognitive approach's research has helped to improve educational methods, and has also discovered ways to improve the reliability of eye-witness testimonies, and other things such as police interviews.

The diagram to the right outlines a mere minority of the mental processes which operate inside our minds. Psychologists who study cognition may be particularly interested in perception, looking at why we pick up on certain things but not others; or language, using the tools of our thoughts and communicating them to others; or even memory, the encoding, storing and retrieval of information from within the brain. Other areas might include attention, thinking, problem-solving and reasoning, all cognitive processes.

A lot of psychologists in the area argue that cognition involved absolutely everything a human being does.



KEY TERMS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF THE APPROACH

- **information processing:** involved the input, manipulation and output of information
- **memory:** the ability to retain and reproduce mental or sensory impressions; it involves encoding, storing and retrieving information
- **forgetting:** losing of putting information away from the memory
- **storing:** the way in which information is retained within the brain after it has been registered
- **retrieving:** the act of locating and extracting stored information from the brain

There are two key assumptions to the cognitive approach; the first one is **information processing** (above). The focus of the approach is on *information processing* and how this might affect behaviour. The flow of information is described as:

INPUT → PROCESS → OUTPUT

The approach assumes information processing to be **linear**. This means that information flows through the brain in a logical way, which is a straight forward staged process like above. One example of this is the **multi-store model** (Atkinson and Shrifin, 1968).

The second key assumption of the approach is **the computer analogy** (see 2.2 The Computer Analogy).