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Perception is the sensory experience of the world. It involves both recognizing environmental stimuli and actions in response to these stimuli.

Through the perceptual process, we gain information about the properties and elements of the environment that are critical to our survival. Perception not only creates our experience of the world around us; it allows us to act within our environment.

**What Is Perception?**

Perception includes the [five senses](https://www.verywellmind.com/coping-with-stress-using-self-soothing-skills-2797579); touch, sight, sound, smell, and taste. It also includes what is known as proprioception, a set of senses involving the ability to detect changes in body positions and movements. It also involves the cognitive processes required to process information, such as recognizing the face of a friend or detecting a familiar scent.

Learn more about how we go from detecting stimuli in the environment to actually taking action based on that information.

**Types of Perception**

Some of the main types of perception include:

* Vision
* Touch
* Sound
* Taste
* Smell

There are also other senses that allow us to perceive things such as balance, time, body position, acceleration, and the perception of internal states. Many of these are multimodal and involve more than one sensory modality. [Social perception](https://www.verywellmind.com/person-perception-2795900), or the ability to identify and use social cues about people and relationships, is another important type of perception.

**How It Works**

The perceptual process is a sequence of steps that begins with the environment and leads to our perception of a stimulus and action in response to the stimulus. It occurs continuously, but you do not spend a great deal of time thinking about the actual *process* that occurs when you perceive the many stimuli that surround you at any given moment.

For example, the process of transforming the light that falls on your retinas into an actual visual image happens unconsciously and automatically. The subtle changes in pressure against your skin that allow you to feel objects occur without a single thought.

Perception acts as a filter that allows us to exist and interpret the world without becoming overwhelmed by the abundance of stimuli.1﻿

**Steps in the Perceptual Process**

1. The Environmental Stimulus
2. The Attended Stimulus
3. The Image on the Retina
4. Transduction
5. Neural Processing
6. Perception
7. Recognition
8. Action

**Impact of Perception**

In order to see the impact of perception, it can be helpful to look at how the process works. This varies somewhat for every sense. In the case of visual perception:

1. **The environmental stimulus:**The world is full of stimuli that can attract attention through various senses. The environmental stimulus is everything in the environment that has the potential to be perceived.
2. **The attended stimulus:** The attended stimulus is the specific object in the environment on which attention is focused.
3. **The image on the retina:** This involves light actually passing through the cornea and pupil and onto the lens of the eye. The cornea helps focus the light as it enters the eye, and the iris of the eye controls the size of the pupils in order to determine how much light to let in. The cornea and lens act together to project an inverted image onto the retina.
4. **Transduction:** The image on the retina is then transformed into electrical signals in a process known as transduction. This allows the visual messages to be transmitted to the brain to be interpreted.
5. **Neural processing:** The electrical signals then undergo neural processing. The path followed by a particular signal depends on what type of signal it is (i.e. an auditory signal or a visual signal).
6. **Perception:** In this step of the process, you perceive the stimulus object in the environment. It is at this point that you become consciously aware of the stimulus.
7. **Recognition:** Perception doesn't just involve becoming consciously aware of the stimuli. It is also necessary for the brain to categorize and interpret what you are sensing. The ability to interpret and give meaning to the object is the next step, known as recognition.
8. **Action:** The action phase of perception involves some type of motor activity that occurs in response to the perceived and recognized stimulus. This might involve a major action, like running toward a person in distress, or something as subtle as blinking your eyes in response to a puff of dust blowing through the air.

The perceptual process allows you to experience the world around you and interact with it in ways that are both appropriate and meaningful.

Take a moment to think of all the things you perceive on a daily basis. At any given moment, you might see familiar objects in your environment, feel the touch of objects and people against your skin, smell the aroma of a home-cooked meal, and hear the sound of [music](https://www.verywellmind.com/surprising-psychological-benefits-of-music-4126866) playing in your next-door neighbor's apartment. All of these things help make up your [conscious experience](https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-conscious-mind-2794984) and allow you to interact with the people and objects around you.