11.4: Selecting and Sorting Filters

Why don’t two people look at the same environment and “see” the same thing? The stimuli from the environment go through a selecting and sorting process allowing some to pass and others to fade away. There are a variety of “filters” that act on these cognitions.

Our psychological condition affects how we recognize incoming data. If we are in love, even a rainy day might look good to us. If we are depressed, no matter how nice our surroundings might be, the reality we create will be negative. It always amazes us to find that whenever we suffer from romantic problems, we hear a song which describes exactly how we feel. We may have heard that song before, but now, we seem to really hear the lyrics for the first time, because of our state of mind.

Our physical condition can affect what data we recognize. Physiological influences include: the senses, age, health, fatigue, hunger, and biological cycles. If we are hungry or tired, we view our environment differently than if we have eaten and have rested. You may have noticed that whenever you attempt to go on a diet, you notice nothing but food advertisements or fast food restaurants. When you’re hungry again, you are more open to receive data concerning food. That’s why food commercials are aired late in the evening, when people are hungry and about ready to snack. I am sometimes convinced that there is nothing but doughnut shops between my house and where I need to go.

Our language creates an organizational system that allows us to understand messages from our environment. Language is instrumental in the way we view, interpret and categorize the world and incoming information. The more limited our vocabulary, the more limited our reality. For example, Southern California doesn’t experience much snow, so there is a limited vocabulary to describe the “white stuff.” We call it snow or slush. Ski buffs may also include the term “powder.” Where we have three words for it, other cultures have many more. Eskimos, for example, have eighteen different language symbols for snow. Each one is used in a different sense to describe such things as quantity, quality, and density. Our ability to experience the reality of snow compared with that of Eskimos is very limited.
"So much there is to see, but our morning eyes describe a different world than do our afternoon eyes and surely our wearied evening eyes can only report a weary evening world…"  

1. John Steinbeck, *Travels With Charley*

Linguist Benjamin Whorf says, “The world is presented in a kaleidoscope of impressions which have to be organized by our minds. Meanings are not so much discovered in experience as imposed upon it, because of the tyrannical hold that linguistic form has upon our orientation in the world. If you ever want to view the world as someone else does, learn their language.”


Our **Formal learning** (K-12 and beyond) shapes how we view our environment. Much of our education is the process of shaping the socially correct view of our environment. Formal education has as its basis the obligation to teach people to be good citizens. We are taught to perceive that values such as democracy and individuality are desirable.

Our **Experiences** are our first-hand informal learning activities. Experiences tend to be layered, one on top of another. Each similar experience is added to a previous experience. Scholarship in this area suggests that first-hand experiences account for only about 5% of everything we know about our environment.

Our **Expectations** are perceptions that we expect to conform to what we already believe the actual event is. We let in those cognitions into the perception process that we expect. Expectations are influenced by: cultural differences, social roles; gender roles; occupational roles; and self-concept. Expectations we have of ourselves fall into the category of self-fulfilling prophecies. In many ways, these self-expectations dictate how we will act towards people, events and things in our environment. They are a powerful conditioning tool that affects our self-esteem and ultimately our judgment.

**Reference**
