

Learner Profile Trait: Inquirers

Skill: Observation

Activity 1: Technology

In this activity you will consider how technology can make us more or less **observant**. Technology is everywhere and it will only become more **omnipresent** as it develops. Technology has a magnifying effect depending how we use it. An individual who is really interested in the world will use the technology to find out as much information as possible. An individual who is less interested in the world will use the technology to interact only with those things that make them feel comfortable.



1. List all of the platforms that you use to communicate and receive information about the world.
2. Now consider the filtering mechanisms that you use (or the platform uses) to filter information that supports your worldview. Research how adverts and news stories are deliberately filtered to target potential customers with specific tasks.
3. Research the politics of the founders of Facebook, Instagram and Google. Should we be concerned that so much power is concentrated into the hands of so few people who seem to have a very similar worldview?
4. Now think about the role that technology plays in politics. Research how 'right wing' news and views are often censored in the USA. Research how 'anti-government' views and the reporting of these are often censored in other nation states. What does this tell us about how news and views are censored or altered to suit political needs?
5. If your political situation allows you to, and in conjunction with a supervising adult, draft a letter to a politician expressing your views on how information is controlled on the internet.
6. Create a t-chart showing the pros and cons of government or corporate control of the internet. What are the advantages and disadvantages of too much or too little corporate or governmental control?

Activity 2: The influence of schemas on our observation skills

In this activity you will consider how **cognitive schemas** influence our ability to **perceive** and remember the world. Cognitive schemas are mental representations that organise our knowledge, beliefs and expectations. Schema processing is to a large extent an automatic and subconscious process which saves cognitive energy but at the same time could result in biases in thinking and other mental processes. For example, a schema is a simplified mental representation of an event or a scene such as an office or home. In a psychology study that investigated the power of schemas on memory, Brewer and Treyens (1981) asked participants to wait in a room that was set up to resemble a graduate student's office. Later they were tested for memory of the room's contents, but many participants said they had seen objects that would be expected to be seen in an academic's office but which were not actually there. Therefore, this shows how details that do not fit into the general mental representation of an event or scene may be deleted (forgotten) or adapted (changed) to match our existing schemas.



1. Think of a schema which may influence how we perceive the world. Design your own psychology study to investigate and test how this scheme is perceived. You won't have to carry out this test but you should still ensure it's an ecologically valid method for testing your theory (realistic, reasonable and doable in the real world). Think about what you might be able to observe or conclude as a result of this test.
2. What does the research on schemas tell us about how to be a good student? How should we guard against schemas and subconscious expectations and how they influence our observation skills?
3. Watch this awareness test.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KB_ITKZm1Ts
4. What are the factors that cause us to miss key details?

***links to external websites were correct at the time of publication. Please check the content before sharing these with your child should the links have changed.**

Activity 3: The power of words on observation

Task:

In this activity you will consider how **leading questions** can make us change what we think we saw. A leading question is a question that is phrased in a certain way to ensure the respondent answers in a certain way. Consider Loftus and Palmer (1974) who showed 150 students a one-minute film which featured a car driving through the countryside followed by a traffic accident. Afterwards, the students were questioned about the film. Some students were asked: 'How fast were the cars going when they hit each other?' Other students were asked: 'How fast were the cars going when they smashed into each other?' One week later the students were asked among other questions: 'Did you see any broken glass? Yes or no?' Participants who were asked how fast the cars were going when they 'smashed' into each other were more likely to report seeing broken glass – despite there actually being no broken glass in the original film.

This research shows how memory is easily distorted by simple things like verbs in questions (hit and smash) and how information acquired after the event can merge with original observations, causing inaccurate memories of past events.



Task:

1. Think of a factor that might influence how we remember the world. For example, how are childhood memories influenced by emotion or even smell? Design your own psychology study to investigate this factor. You won't have to carry out this investigation but your chosen test method should be realistic, reasonable and doable in the real world. Once you've done this, consider the ways in which our memories are open to influence. Do we really remember the world the way we thought we observed it?
2. What does the research on memory manipulation tell us about how to be a good student? How should we guard against influences on memory and how they influence our observation skills?
3. Research the 'Cognitive Interview' which has been adopted by many police forces. What might it tell us about police investigations that do not use it? Research the expectations for police interviews from your own cultural background. What safeguards are on offer to ensure witnesses report what they saw without bias?