

 SCIENTIFICBULLETIN

AMERICAN

Journal of Open University Education

ISSN: : 2997-3899

USA



American Journal of Open University Education			
ISSN: 2997-3899			
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Specific Tips and Peculiarities for Improving Cognitive Skills

Saidova Zulfizar Khudoyberdievna

PhD of English linguistics department of Bukhara state university

Article information:

Manuscript received: 05 July 2024; **Accepted:** 08 Aug 2024; **Published:** 09 Sep 2024

Abstract: In psychology, the term “cognitive” refers to anything that has to do with thinking, learning, and understanding. Therefore, when people talk about cognitive skills or processes, they are referring to various aspects of how the brain functions, such as remembering information, learning new things, paying attention, and processing all of the information you encounter on a daily basis. You put your cognitive abilities to use every day.

Keywords: cognition, psychology, instrument, knowledge, instructive materials new concepts.

When you learn a new instrument, for instance, you use your cognitive abilities to learn the fundamentals of music theory, identify melodies, learn the notes, and combine all of this information to create music. Problem-solving is an important part of our daily lives, whether we're deciding what to eat for dinner or when to buy a house. Learn some of the strategies for solving problems and how to use them in real life, as well as how to get around obstacles that make it harder to solve problems.

Cognitive processes affect every aspect of life, from school to work to relationships. Some specific uses for these processes include the following:

1. **Learning New Things.** Learning requires being able to take in new information, form new memories, and make connections with other things that you already know. Researchers and educators use their knowledge of these cognitive processes to create instructive materials to help people learn new concepts.
2. **Forming Memories.** Memory is a major topic of interest in the field of cognitive psychology. How we remember, what we remember, and what we forget reveal a great deal about how cognitive processes operate.
3. While people often think of memory as being much like a video camera—carefully recording, cataloging, and storing life events away for later recall—research has found that memory is much more complex.
4. **Making Decisions.** Whenever people make any type of a decision, it involves making judgments about things they have processed. This might involve comparing new information to prior knowledge, integrating new information into existing ideas, or even replacing old knowledge with new knowledge before making a choice.
5. **Impact of Cognition.** Our cognitive processes have a wide-ranging impact that influences everything from our daily life to our overall health.

6. **Perceiving the World.** As you take in sensations from the world around you, the information that you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell must first be transformed into signals that the brain can understand. The perceptual process allows you to take in this sensory information and convert it into a signal that your brain can recognize and act upon.
7. **Forming Impressions.** The world is full of an endless number of sensory experiences. To make meaning out of all this incoming information, it is important for the brain to be able to capture the fundamentals. Events are reduced to only the critical concepts and ideas that we need.
8. **Filling in the Gaps.** In addition to reducing information to make it more memorable and understandable, people also elaborate on these memories as they reconstruct them. In some cases, this elaboration happens when people are struggling to remember something. When the information cannot be recalled, the brain sometimes fills in the missing data with whatever seems to fit.
9. **Interacting With the World.** Cognition involves not only the things that go on inside our heads but also how these thoughts and mental processes influence our actions.¹⁵ Our attention to the world around us, memories of past events, understanding of language, judgments about how the world works, and abilities to solve problems all contribute to how we behave and interact with our surrounding environment.

Cognitive processes are influenced by a range of factors, including genetics and experiences. While you cannot change your genes or age, there are things that you can do to protect and maximize your cognitive abilities:

- **Stay healthy.** Lifestyle factors such as eating a nutritious diet and getting regular exercise can have a positive effect on cognitive functioning.¹⁶
- **Think critically.** Question your assumptions and ask questions about your thoughts, beliefs, and conclusions.
- **Stay curious and keep learning.** A great way to flex your cognitive abilities is to keep challenging yourself to learn more about the world.
- **Skip multitasking.** While it might seem like doing several things at once would help you get done faster, research has shown it actually decreases both productivity.

In psychology, the term 'cognitive' refers to all of the different mental events involved in thinking, learning, and comprehending. Cognitive processes such as learning, attention, perception, and memory are important parts of the human experience. Understanding how they function can provide insight into normal human thought and behavior and how different cognitive conditions might create problems and impairments.

Best Herbs and Spices for Brain Health

Frequently Asked Questions

- Does cognition mean thinking?

Thinking is an important component, but cognition also encompasses unconscious and perceptual processes as well. In addition to thinking, cognition involves language, attention, learning, memory, and perception.

In cognitive psychology, the term 'problem-solving' refers to the mental process that people go through to discover, analyze, and solve problems.¹

A problem exists when there is a goal that we want to achieve but the process by which we will achieve it is not obvious to us.² Put another way, there is something that we want to occur in our life, yet we are not immediately certain how to make it happen.

Maybe you want a better relationship with your spouse or another family member but you're not sure how

to improve it. Or you want to start a business but are unsure what steps to take. Problem-solving helps you figure out how to achieve these desires.

The problem-solving process involves:

1. Discovery of the problem
2. Deciding to tackle the issue
3. Seeking to understand the problem more fully
4. Researching available options or solutions
5. Taking action to resolve the issue

Before problem-solving can occur, it is important to first understand the exact nature of the problem itself. If your understanding of the issue is faulty, your attempts to resolve it will also be incorrect or flawed.

Problem-Solving Mental Processes

Several mental processes are at work during problem-solving. Among them are:

- Perceptually recognizing the problem
- Representing the problem in memory
- Considering relevant information that applies to the problem
- Identifying different aspects of the problem
- Labeling and describing the problem

Problem-Solving Strategies

There are many ways to go about solving a problem. Some of these strategies might be used on their own, or you may decide to employ multiple approaches when working to figure out and fix a problem.

Algorithms

An algorithm is a step-by-step procedure that, by following certain "rules" produces a solution. Algorithms are commonly used in mathematics to solve division or multiplication problems. But they can be used in other fields as well.

In psychology, algorithms can be used to help identify individuals with a greater risk of mental health issues. For instance, research suggests that certain algorithms might help us recognize children with an elevated risk of suicide or self-harm.³

One benefit of algorithms is that they guarantee an accurate answer. However, they aren't always the best approach to problem-solving, in part because detecting patterns can be incredibly time-consuming.

There are also concerns when machine learning is involved—also known as artificial intelligence (AI)—such as whether they can accurately predict human behaviors.⁴

Heuristics

Heuristics are shortcut strategies that people can use to solve a problem at hand. These "rule of thumb" approaches allow you to simplify complex problems, reducing the total number of possible solutions to a more manageable set.

If you find yourself sitting in a traffic jam, for example, you may quickly consider other routes, taking one to get moving once again. When shopping for a new car, you might think back to a prior experience when negotiating got you a lower price, then employ the same tactics.

While heuristics may be helpful when facing smaller issues, major decisions shouldn't necessarily be made using a shortcut approach.⁵ Heuristics also don't guarantee an effective solution, such as when trying to

drive around a traffic jam only to find yourself on an equally crowded route.

Trial and Error

A trial-and-error approach to problem-solving involves trying a number of potential solutions to a particular issue, then ruling out those that do not work. If you're not sure whether to buy a shirt in blue or green, for instance, you may try on each before deciding which one to purchase.

This can be a good strategy to use if you have a limited number of solutions available. But if there are many different choices available, narrowing down the possible options using another problem-solving technique can be helpful before attempting trial and error.

Insight. In some cases, the solution to a problem can appear as a sudden insight. You are facing an issue in a relationship or your career when, out of nowhere, the solution appears in your mind and you know exactly what to do.

Insight can occur when the problem in front of you is similar to an issue that you've dealt with in the past. Although, you may not recognize what is occurring since the underlying mental processes that lead to insight often happen outside of conscious awareness.

Research indicates that insight is most likely to occur during times when you are alone—such as when going on a walk by yourself, when you're in the shower, or when lying in bed after waking up.

If you're facing a problem, you can implement one or more of these strategies to find a potential solution. Here's how to use them in real life:

- **Create a flow chart.** If you have time, you can take advantage of the algorithm approach to problem-solving by sitting down and making a flow chart of each potential solution, its consequences, and what happens next.
- **Recall your past experiences.** When a problem needs to be solved fairly quickly, heuristics may be a better approach. Think back to when you faced a similar issue, then use your knowledge and experience to choose the best option possible.
- **Start trying potential solutions.** If your options are limited, start trying them one by one to see which solution is best for achieving your desired goal. If a particular solution doesn't work, move on to the next.
- **Take some time alone.** Since insight is often achieved when you're alone, carve out time to be by yourself for a while. The answer to your problem may come to you, seemingly out of the blue, if you spend some time away from others.

Problem-solving is not a flawless process as there are a number of obstacles that can interfere with our ability to solve a problem quickly and efficiently. These obstacles include:

- **Assumptions:** When dealing with a problem, people can make assumptions about the constraints and obstacles that prevent certain solutions. Thus, they may not even try some potential options.
- **Functional fixedness:** This term refers to the tendency to view problems only in their customary manner.⁷ Functional fixedness prevents people from fully seeing all of the different options that might be available to find a solution.
- **Irrelevant or misleading information:** When trying to solve a problem, it's important to distinguish between information that is relevant to the issue and irrelevant data that can lead to faulty solutions. The more complex the problem, the easier it is to focus on misleading or irrelevant information.
- **Mental set:** A mental set is a tendency to only use solutions that have worked in the past rather than looking for alternative ideas.⁸ A mental set can work as a heuristic, making it a useful problem-solving tool. However, mental sets can also lead to inflexibility, making it more difficult to find effective solutions.

How to Improve Your Problem-Solving Skills

In the end, if your goal is to become a better problem-solver, it's helpful to remember that this is a process. Thus, if you want to improve your problem-solving skills, following these steps can help lead you to your solution:

- **Recognize that a problem exists.** If you are facing a problem, there are generally signs. For instance, if you have a mental illness, you may experience excessive fear or sadness, mood changes, and changes in sleeping or eating habits.⁹ recognizing these signs can help you realize that an issue exists.
- **Decide to solve the problem.** Make a conscious decision to solve the issue at hand. Commit to yourself that you will go through the steps necessary to find a solution.
- **Seek to fully understand the issue.** Analyze the problem you face, looking at it from all sides. If your problem is relationship-related, for instance, ask yourself how the other person may be interpreting the issue. You might also consider how your actions might be contributing to the situation.
- **Research potential options.** Using the problem-solving strategies mentioned, research potential solutions. Make a list of options, then consider each one individually. What are some pros and cons of taking the available routes? What would you need to do to make them happen?
- **Take action.** Select the best solution possible and take action. Action is one of the steps required for change. So, go through the motions needed to resolve the issue.
- **Try another option, if needed.** If the solution you chose didn't work, don't give up. Either go through the problem-solving process again or simply try another option.

You can find a way to solve your problems as long as you keep working toward this goal—even if the best solution is simply to let go because no other good solution exists.

Cognitive refers to the mental processes involved in gaining knowledge and comprehension. Some of the many different cognitive processes include thinking, knowing, remembering, judging, and problem-solving.

These are higher-level brain functions that encompass language, imagination, perception, and planning. Cognitive psychology is the field of psychology that investigates how people think and the processes involved in cognition.

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CERTIFICATE

OF PUBLICATION

This certificate is presented to

SAIDOVA ZULFIZAR KHUDOYBERDIEVNA

in recognition of the paper publication of the research paper on

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF OPEN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION

2997-3899 with the title:

"Specific Tips and Peculiarities for Improving Cognitive Skills"

Vol. 1 No. 9(2024): AJOU

09.09.2024

Date


Abaybek Junisov
editor-in-chief