# Assumptions of the cognitive approach

## Assumption 1: internal mental processes

Humans use cognitive processes to make sense of the world around them. Cognitive psychologists suggest that we use our senses to collect information from the outside world, e.g. sight, and then we use internal mental processes to interpret this information. Examples of these processes are **memory**, **language**, **attention**, **decision making** and **perception**. These processes all work together in order for us to understand the world. These processes all occur very quickly and often are automatic. For example, if a friend asks you a question you will first pay attention to what is being said, use language processing to interpret the sounds, then call on your memory to recall relevant information and then formulate an answer.

### Psychological example:

In order to study internal mental processes, psychologists use **introspection**, this is when a participant describes how a task/stimulus makes them feel.

Griffiths (1994) asked participants to use introspection when playing on a fruit machine. Griffiths was interested in the processes that gamblers and non-regular gamblers made. Participants were asked to 'think aloud' (say everything they were thinking). They found that regular gamblers made more irrational verbalisations than non-regular gamblers.

## Assumption 2: computer analogy

Cognitive psychologists suggest that the human mind works in a similar way to a computer. A computer will receive an input, e.g. from a keyboard, process it, through display and storage, and then output, recalling a document previously saved. The human mind works in a similar manner. Our senses work as an input, information is then stored and retrieved when needed. Imagine your teacher is teaching you about the computer analogy: you listen to their explanation (input), rehearse it (process) and then when asked a question by your teacher you recall it (output). Therefore, the key ideas are input, process, and output.

### Psychological example:

Atkinson and Shiffrin (1968) devised the multi-store model of memory. They suggested there are three stores of memory. The first store is sensory memory. If you pay attention to the input, then the information moves to short term memory (the second store). Rehearsing this information will result in the information moving to long term memory (the third store).

So, the sensory memory works as an **input**, paying attention and rehearsal are forms of **processing** and retrieval is an example of **output**.

## Assumption 3: schemas

Schemas can be described as knowledge packets of information. Schemas can change with experience. If you learn a new fact (and rehearse it, this links back to internal mental processes) then your schema will adapt.

Schemas come in a variety of forms. The concept of scripts is a popular idea in schemas. These are how we expect certain situations to unfold.

Most people have very similar scripts for social situations, e.g. that when entering a restaurant, you first wait to be seated and end by paying the bill.

### Psychological example:

The halo effect suggests that if our schema for an individual contains positive impressions, e.g. the person is friendly, then we are more likely to believe they have other positive characteristics as well, e.g. they are also intelligent.

Dion et al. (1972) famously found that individuals who were judged to be physically attractive were also judged to be more competent romantic partners, more successful in their careers and possess other positive attributes. Therefore, the schema assumption would suggest that we may enter romantic relationships with people we find physically attractive as we also believe they have other positive characteristics as well.

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### Applying internal mental processes/computer analogy to the formation of relationships

The social exchange theory suggests that when deciding on a potential partner we make a cost benefit analysis. Developed by Thibaut & Kelly (1959), this theory suggest we are attracted to those whose benefits outweigh the costs. For example, a potential partner may be funny (benefit) but they may be lazy (cost). An individual would weigh up these before making a final decision. If the benefits outweigh the costs, then there is a greater chance that a relationship will form and last. An individual's own concept about relationships will also play a part. Some individuals may have high expectations about what they want from a relationship and this will play a part in the decision. This is called the comparison level. A further factor in the decision is the availability of other potential relationships. This is known as the comparison level for alternatives. If there are plenty of other options, then an individual may have higher expectations and more likely to end relationships that they are not fully satisfied with. Therefore, relationships are formed using internal mental processes like **decision making**. The computer analogy can also be applied to this concept. Individuals observe behaviours such as costs (**input**), weigh up the cost and benefits (**process**) and then make a decision on the relationship (**output**).

### Evidence:

Sacher & Fine (1996) investigated what factors predicted relationship satisfaction. They found that if females had poor quality relationship alternatives, they had positive relationships six months later. This supports the idea for comparison level of alternatives.

### Applying schemas to the formation of relationships

The way we view ourselves (self-schemas) has a bearing on our romantic relationships. The **matching hypothesis** suggests that individuals will look to pursue relationships with individuals of a similar level of physical attractiveness. Therefore, an individual confident in their physical attractiveness will look to start relationships with other physically attractive people.

### Applying schemas to the formation of relationships

The halo effect suggests that if our schema for an individual contains positive impressions, e.g. the person is friendly, then we are more likely to believe they have other positive characteristics as well, e.g. they are also intelligent. So, the schemas we have for other people helps determine the likelihood of forming romantic relationships.