

Chapter One: [The Human Mind: The Final Frontier of the Body](#)

Welcome to the study of cognitive psychology, a [newer](#) branch of psychology

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that seeks to describe and explore [thought processes](#) and mental states.

Cognition refers to the creation and awareness of thought, including awareness,

reasoning, and judgment. These thought processes drive our daily actions

consciously and unconsciously. For example, when you brushed your teeth today,

[you probably](#) did not experience great cognitive exhaustion. You did not need to

read a manual, ask questions of a 1-800 hotline or stop in frustration because you

did not have all of the necessary materials. [You had](#) no conscious thought about the

materials or steps needed—[you](#) simply acted as if guided by an automatic pilot. The

ability to complete these automatic tasks, without real thought, fascinates many

cognitive psychologists. Other cognitive researchers spend their entire careers

exploring how conscious thoughts emerge, are stored, are changed, are used, and

are recalled. **Memory** refers to the ability to recall past events, concepts, people, and

other knowledge. These are two examples of **thought processes** that occur in the

memory system.

Mental states refer to our ability to assess and understand the current state

of our own mind and those of others. For example, if you work hard to understand a

new mathematical concept and then hear your professor describe it differently [from](#)

your understanding, it is easy to feel frustrated. Frustration is not an emotion; it is a

mental state that refers to our inability to meet a specific goal despite our efforts to

do so. When our desire to understand a concept is paired with our inability to meet

the goal, we experience [the](#) mental state [of](#) frustration. If [your](#) professor provides

two contradictory explanations of that new mathematical concept, [you](#) try to understand both simultaneously [since](#) they are introduced in this manner. Rather than using our mental energy to understand the information, we instead feel trapped as we attempt to make sense of both sets of directions. [As](#) the directions are contradictory, we enter a new mental state, [known as](#) confusion.

Early cognitive psychologists often studied their own processes and mental states as they noticed them. Once a cognitive process was identified and explained, many other psychologists created hypotheses and studies to test the process. Interestingly, this is still a young field, as new discoveries are made annually based on the results of experiments in neuroscience. With the invention of such machines as the functional magnetic resonance imagery (fMRI) and the positron-emission topography scan (PET scan) machines, both neuroscientists and cognitive psychologists can better understand the mysteries of perception, memory, emotion, and cognition. Before the invention of these machines and their subsequent studies, psychologists and other social scientists were left to wonder about these great mysteries.

In this text, you will learn how perception, memory, attention, emotion, organization, and cognition work in the mind, [which](#) parts of the brain are responsible for [these](#) mental processes, and how to use these theories to benefit your [life and the](#) lives of others. Join in on this fascinating journey through the human mind—the final frontier of the body!