Perception is one of the four ways of knowing:

- **Perception**
- Language
- Emotion
- Reason

**Perception** = awareness of the world through our five senses.

**Which sense would you be most willing to lose?**

Humans are very visually oriented, e.g.:

- ‘Seeing is believing.’ (Not: ‘Smelling is believing.’)
- ‘I see what you mean.’ (Not: ‘I smell what you mean.’)
- ‘He has insight.’ (Not: ‘He has insmell.’)

Our sense of smell has a more direct route to the brain than the other senses. It can stimulate emotional and/or sexual response, memories, etc. (The perfume industry cashes in on this.)

**Philosophical views of the basis of knowledge (pp. 86–7, 99–101)**

**Empiricism**

All knowledge is based on perceptual experience.

**Phenomenalism**

(This is a more extreme extension of empiricism.)

Matter is the permanent possibility of sensation. It makes no sense to say that the world exists independently of our experience of it.

Irish philosopher George Berkeley (1685–1753): ‘To be is to be perceived.’

It does **not** mean that if something is not perceived it does not exist. It is just that if we do not perceive it, it **may** not exist. For example, does your home still exist when you cannot see it?

**Common-sense realism**

Observation does not affect what is observed. If our senses were not reliable we would not have survived as a species.

**Active realism**

Our perception is based on what is ‘out there’, but is filtered by the structure of our sense organs.
Scientific realism

The world exists as an independent reality very different from the way we perceive it. Our world has sound, smell, etc. The physical world consists of colourless, soundless atoms whizzing in empty space.

Rationalism (p. 112)

Reason is the most important source of new knowledge. We can discover new truths by using reason alone.

Perceptual illusions (pp. 87–91)

External stimulus → sense cells stimulated → brain unconsciously filters incoming information → subjective interpretation → personal version of reality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of visual illusion</th>
<th>Problem</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Context can influence interpretation</td>
<td>Relative position of things results in different judgements, e.g. perspective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure and ground</td>
<td>What you see is dependent on things you assume are the main subject (figure) or background (ground).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual grouping</td>
<td>The brain takes patterns and fills in missing parts to make a meaningful picture which may not be correct, e.g. pictures in clouds/stars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations can cause perceptual error</td>
<td>E.g. it is difficult to spot one’s own writing errors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Selectivity of perception (pp. 91–2)

Incoming perception is filtered to avoid ‘brain overload’.

- We focus on what is ‘important’ at the time.
- It is filtered by our interests (which can change).
- Potential threats can intrude on our focus and make us notice them.

Discussions: Activities 4.5 and 4.6, pp. 92, 93
Seeing and believing (pp. 93–4)

Beliefs can affect perception. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of knowledge</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Nineteenth-century astronomers thought there might be a planet (Vulcan) between Mercury and the sun. Some claimed to have seen it through their telescopes, but it did not exist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>30 January 1972 Bloody Sunday, Northern Ireland British and Irish Catholic eye-witnesses both claimed the other side attacked first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Some artists draw horses with eyelashes top and bottom, but horses only have top lashes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion: Activity 4.7, p. 93

Eye-witness testimony can differ. Every time we remember something we reconstruct it in our minds → reliability is undermined.

Discussion: Activity 4.8, p. 94

Distinguishing appearance from reality (pp. 95–6)

We may:

1. misinterpret what we see
2. fail to notice something
3. misremember what we have seen.

We should not be too sceptical because:

1. another sense may confirm the evidence
2. we tend to question/test the coherence of illogical perception, e.g. blue flying pigs
3. credibility is reinforced by independent testimony.
Ultimate reality (pp. 96–7)

Our perceptions are filtered by the limitations of our sensory cells (also known as the ‘psychology of perception’):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sense</th>
<th>Limitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sight</td>
<td>Wavelength of light.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound</td>
<td>Wavelength of sound.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Bats also have <strong>echo-location</strong>, or ‘sound vision’.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smell</td>
<td>Only certain kinds of smell stimulate sensory cells in nose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch</td>
<td>Minimal stimulation necessary in order to fire sensory cells in skin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste</td>
<td>Only certain chemicals stimulate sensory cells in tongue.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What is really out there? (pp. 97–9)

External stimulus → sense cells stimulated → brain unconsciously filters incoming information → subjective interpretation → personal version of reality.

See also:

Linking questions: p. 104

Reading resources:

(Teachers may wish to set their own assignments on these.)

Blind to change p. 105

A world without patterns, faces without meaning p. 108