

STAGES AND GUIDELINES OF INPUT PROCESSING

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Input processing refers to the different ways in which we use social knowledge to understand other people's messages. The stages of input processing are: selective exposure, selective attention, interpretation, and inference.

When we go out of our way to place ourselves in or to avoid situations where we will be certain to encounter a certain event or person, we have engaged in selective exposure. The decision to enter or to avoid is based on your social knowledge of what you believe is likely to happen in situation. We selectively attend to, or focus on, some aspects of a situation, while we ignore other aspects of that situation completely. The schema that is currently invoked in our mind determines where we will search for the information that we do attend to in the situation. This stage is called selective attention. The information to which you did selectively attend would then be decoded. This means that you would transform the actual object or event you observed into a mental picture. People interpret or make sense, of new information by matching it with social knowledge held in the schema activated at the time of processing. If this match is ambiguous or incomplete inconsistencies are resolved and missing pieces of the puzzle are filled by interference. Interpretation involves classifying and labeling ambiguous behavior so that its meaning is clear.

The guideline, then, is to realize that our snap judgments or first impressions can be inaccurate, and that we should give others the opportunity to violate our expectations. Stereotyping occurs when we assume that every member of a social group possesses all of the attributes we associate with that group.

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