Your notes

GCSE Psychology: revision notes

Theories of perception and perceptual set

Contents

1. Gibson's direct theory
2. Gregory's constructivist theory
3. Perceptual set
4. Key terms
5. Quick questions
6. What to do next

Gibson's direct theory

- Gibson argued that perception is direct and bottom-up: the information in the environment is rich enough for us to perceive without needing past experience.
- **Motion parallax**: as we move, nearer objects seem to pass quickly and further ones slowly, giving depth information.
- Evaluation: it explains how we perceive quickly in real life and why babies can perceive depth early, but it can't explain visual illusions.

Gregory's constructivist theory

- Gregory argued that perception is indirect and top-down: we use past experience and knowledge to make **inferences** about what we see.
- Visual illusions happen because we make wrong **inferences**, such as misapplying depth cues.
- Evaluation: it explains illusions and cultural differences, but it can't fully explain how perception works so quickly and accurately, and depends on experiences babies don't yet have.

Perceptual set

- **Perceptual set** is a readiness to perceive things in a certain way. It is affected by expectation, motivation, emotion and culture.
- Expectation: Bruner and Minturn showed an ambiguous figure that could be read as "B" or "13". People saw it as B among letters and as 13 among numbers.
- Motivation: Gilchrist and Nesberg found that hungry participants rated pictures of food as brighter than people who weren't hungry.
- Culture: Hudson found that people from some cultures interpreted depth cues in pictures differently, suggesting culture affects perception.

Key terms

Direct theory	Gibson's idea that perception comes directly from the environment (bottom-up).
Constructivist theory	Gregory's idea that perception uses past experience to make inferences (top-down).
Perceptual set	A readiness to perceive things in a particular way.
Motion parallax	Nearer objects seeming to move faster than further ones as we move.
Inference	A conclusion drawn from evidence and experience.
Top-down processing	Perception guided by knowledge and expectation.
Bottom-up processing	Perception built from sensory information alone.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who proposed the direct theory of perception?
2. Who proposed the constructivist theory of perception?
3. What is perceptual set?
4. What did Bruner and Minturn's study show?
5. What did Gilchrist and Nesberg find?
6. What did Hudson's research suggest?
7. What is motion parallax?
8. Which theory explains visual illusions better?

Answers

1. Gibson
2. Gregory
3. A readiness to perceive things in a particular way
4. Expectation affects perception
5. Hungry people rated food pictures as brighter
6. Culture affects how people interpret depth cues
7. Nearer objects seeming to move faster than further ones as we move
8. Gregory's constructivist theory

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 4 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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