

Understanding

This article is about the psychological process. For other uses, see [Understanding \(disambiguation\)](#). “Understand” redirects here. For other uses, see [Understand \(disambiguation\)](#).

Understanding (also called **intellecion**) is a process related to an abstract or physical object, such as a [person](#), situation, or [message](#) whereby one is able to think about it and use [concepts](#) to deal adequately with that object. Understanding is a relation between the knower and an object of understanding. Understanding implies abilities and dispositions with respect to an object of knowledge sufficient to support intelligent behavior.^[1]

An understanding is the limit of a conceptualization. To understand something is to have conceptualized it to a given measure.

1 Examples

1. One understands the weather if one is able to predict and to give an explanation of some of its features, etc.
2. A [psychiatrist](#) understands another person's [anxieties](#) if he/she knows that person's anxieties, their causes, and can give useful [advice](#) on how to cope with the anxiety.
3. A [person](#) understands a command if he/she knows who gave it, what is expected by the issuer, and whether the command is legitimate, and whether one understands the speaker (see 4).
4. One understands a [reasoning](#), an [argument](#), or a [language](#) if one can consciously reproduce the information content conveyed by the message.
5. One understands a mathematical concept if one can solve problems using it, especially problems that are not similar to what one has seen before.

2 Understanding as a model

Gregory Chaitin, a noted computer scientist, propounds a view that comprehension is a kind of data compression.^[2] In his essay “The Limits of Reason”, he argues that *understanding* something means being able to figure out a simple set of rules that explains it. For example,

we understand why day and night exist because we have a simple [model](#)—the rotation of the earth—that explains a tremendous amount of data—changes in brightness, temperature, and atmospheric composition of the earth. We have compressed a large amount of information by using a simple model that [predicts](#) it. Similarly, we understand the number 0.33333... by thinking of it as one-third. The first way of representing the number requires an infinite amount of memory; but the second way can produce all the data of the first representation, but uses much less information. Chaitin argues that comprehension is this ability to compress data.

3 Components of understanding

3.1 Cognition and affect

Main articles: [cognition and affect \(psychology\)](#)

Cognition is the process by which sensory inputs are transformed. Affect refers to the experience of feelings or emotions. Cognition and affect constitute understanding.

4 Religious perspectives

In [Catholicism](#) and [Anglicanism](#), understanding is one of the [Seven gifts of the Holy Spirit](#).

5 See also

- [Active listening](#)
- [Awareness](#)
- [Binah \(Kabbalah\)](#)
- [Chinese room](#)
- [Communication](#)
- [Epistemology](#)
- [Hermeneutic circle](#)
- [Informational listening](#)
- [Ishin-denshin](#)

- List of language disorders
- Meaning (linguistics)
- Natural language understanding
- Nous
- Perception
- Thought

6 References

- [1] Bereiter, Carl. "Education and mind in the Knowledge Age".
- [2] Chaitin, Gregory (2006), *The Limits Of Reason* (PDF)

7 External links

- Understanding at PhilPapers

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8.1 Text

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