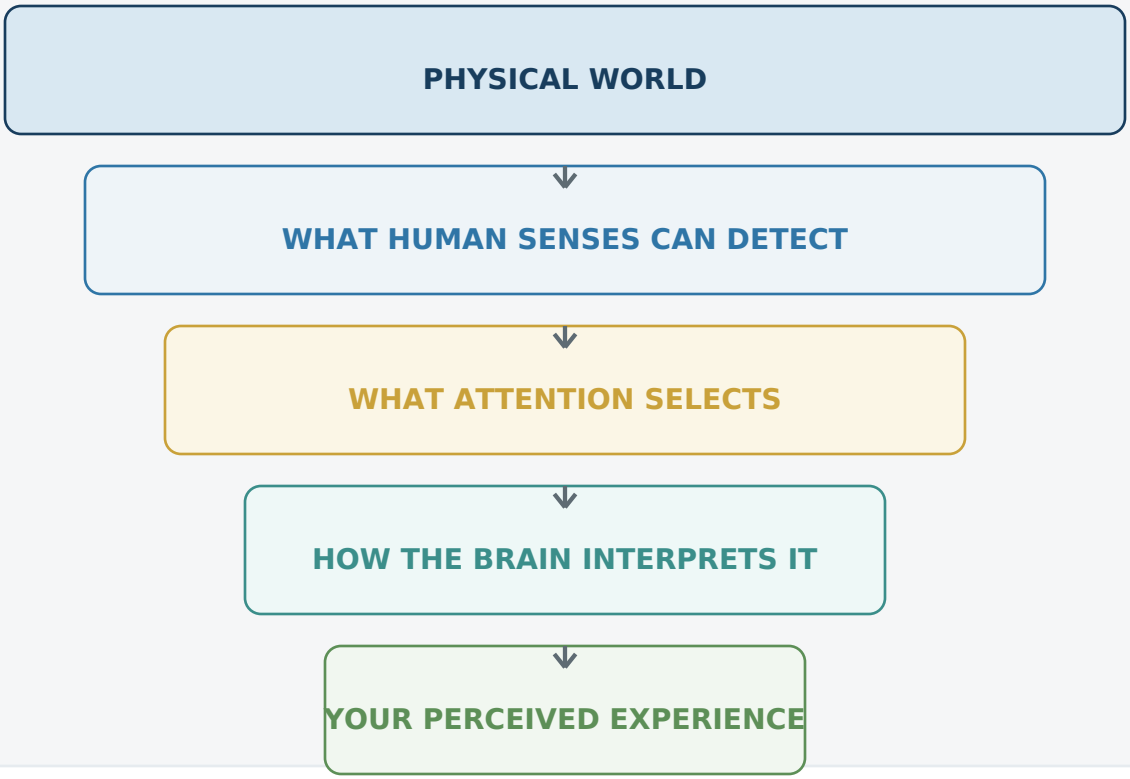
Lesson 2

The World Is Larger Than What We Perceive

How our senses give us a useful - but incomplete - experience of reality

THE PERCEPTION FILTER



The world is real. Our experience of it is filtered.

We respond to what our brains can detect, select, and interpret.

This lesson is educational, not medical or psychological advice. Perception is complex; the models here are simplified tools for observation and learning.

1. The Big Idea: We Experience a Filtered World

The physical environment contains far more information than a human nervous system can register or consciously use at one time. Our sensory systems sample certain forms and ranges of information. Attention narrows that stream further. The brain then organizes and interprets what remains.

This does not mean reality is imaginary or that perception is useless. Quite the opposite: perception is extraordinarily useful. It allows us to navigate, learn, communicate, find food and safety, detect opportunities and threats, and coordinate with other people. But useful is not the same as complete.

Perception begins with reality,
but it is not a complete recording of reality.

It is a biologically filtered and interpreted
experience of it.

That difference matters for approach and avoidance.

Three Filters to Notice

1. Detection

What kinds of energy, chemicals, pressure, temperature, motion, and internal signals can the human body detect at all?

2. Attention

Of all the available information, what is selected for priority processing or conscious focus?

3. Interpretation

How do memory, context, goals, expectations, emotion, and learning influence what the information means?

Why This Matters

- Two people can occupy the same environment and notice different things.
- The same sensory input can be interpreted differently depending on context and prior learning.
- A customer, patient, employee, or family member may be responding to a different perceived situation than the one we assume they are experiencing.
- Approach and avoidance begin with what the situation seems to mean to the person - not with a perfect copy of the external world.

2. The Five Senses: Useful Windows, Not Complete Windows

The familiar five senses are a useful starting framework. Each one samples a particular kind of information. None gives us access to everything that exists in that domain.

SIGHT

Human vision detects only a narrow band of electromagnetic radiation - roughly the wavelengths we call visible light. Infrared, ultraviolet, radio waves, microwaves, and X-rays exist outside ordinary human vision.

HEARING

Human hearing covers only part of the possible sound-frequency range, and sensitivity varies with age and individual differences. Other species detect frequencies we normally cannot hear.

SMELL

Our olfactory system detects many airborne chemicals through a limited receptor system. It is sensitive and useful, but it does not identify every molecule in the environment.

TASTE

Taste receptors provide a small set of basic signals. What we experience as flavor also depends heavily on smell, texture, temperature, and prior learning.

TOUCH

Touch includes information about pressure, vibration, texture, temperature, pain, and more. Sensitivity varies across the body and between people.

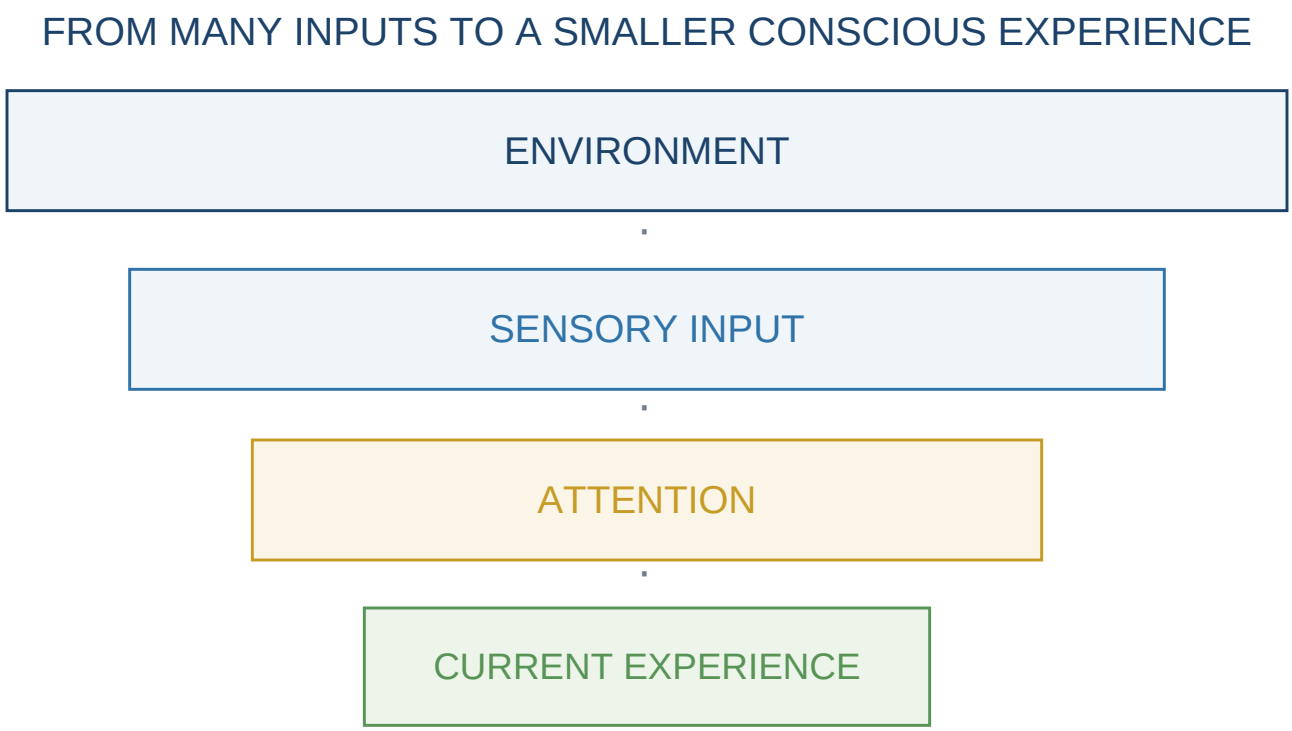
Important Scientific Note

The traditional "five senses" are a teaching shortcut. Humans also have sensory systems related to balance, body position, pain, temperature, and internal bodily conditions. This lesson uses the five-sense framework because it is familiar, not because it is a complete list.

3. Even What We Can Detect Gets Filtered by Attention

Sensory systems already provide only part of the available information. Attention narrows the stream again. We cannot consciously process every sound, sight, sensation, thought, and memory with equal priority.

Attention is influenced by current goals, novelty, uncertainty, learned importance, emotional relevance, and possible threat or reward. What gets selected can strongly shape the experience that follows.



A Touchpoint Example

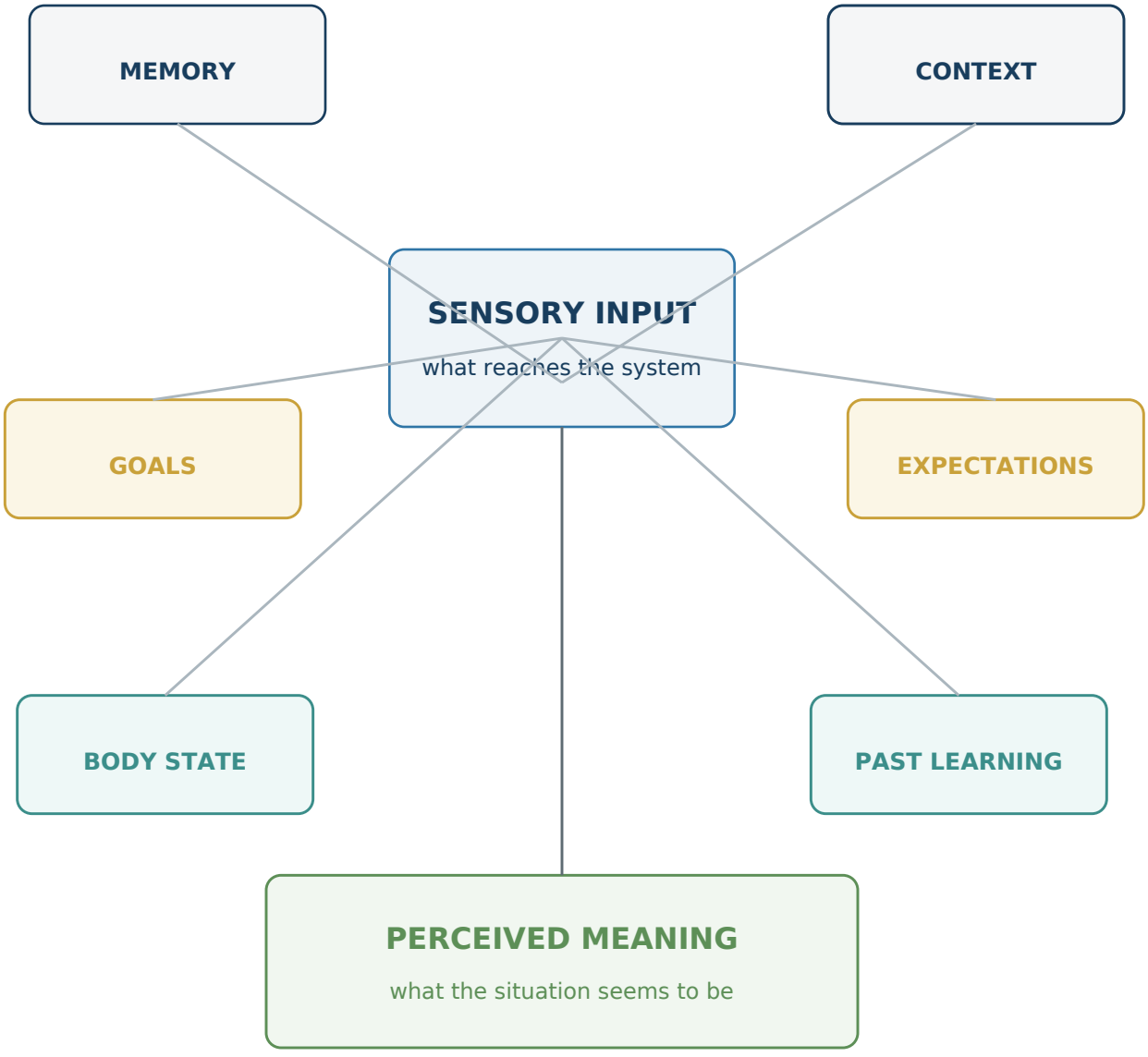
A business may carefully design twenty positive features of an experience. The customer may notice one confusing sign, one long wait, or one dismissive interaction. That single selected event can become the most important part of the experience - even though it was only one part of the physical situation.

What we notice is not random - but it is not complete either.
Attention helps determine which part of the world becomes psychologically important.

4. The Brain Adds Meaning

Detection and attention still do not produce a finished experience. The brain has to interpret the information. Perception is shaped by the relationship between incoming signals and what the person already knows, expects, values, remembers, and needs.

The Same Input Can Mean Different Things



A Useful Caution

Because perception is influenced by prior learning and context, we should be cautious about assuming that another person "saw what I saw" or "heard what I heard." They may have detected, attended to, or interpreted different information.

5. The Same World Can Produce Different Experiences

Differences in perception become especially important in customer, patient, employee, and social experiences. The organization can control parts of a touchpoint, but it cannot fully control what each person notices or what the experience means to them.

TOUCHPOINT	ORGANIZATION MAY SEE	PERSON MAY PERCEIVE
Automated phone system	Efficiency and lower service cost	Convenience - or a barrier to reaching a human
Hospital waiting room	Necessary queue and clinical prioritization	Safety and care - or uncertainty, pain, and loss of control
New employee software	Productivity and standardization	Useful tool - or threat to competence, workload, or job security
Self-checkout	Faster throughput and customer choice	Control and speed - or confusion, surveillance, or job loss
Minimal hotel lobby	Modern design and operational simplicity	Calm and sophisticated - or cold and unwelcoming

Organizations design touchpoints. People experience perceptions.

Perception influences trust, emotion, approach / avoid, and action.

6. Reflection Exercise: Notice Your Filter

Choose one recent everyday experience. It can be a conversation, store visit, meeting, drive, website, meal, medical appointment, or ordinary moment. The goal is observation, not diagnosis.

1. What was physically happening?

Describe the situation as neutrally as you can.

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2. What sensory information did you notice?

What did you see, hear, smell, taste, or feel?

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3. What might have been present that you did not notice?

What information could have existed outside your attention or sensory range?

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4. Where did your attention go?

What seemed most important, unusual, rewarding, threatening, or uncertain?

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5. What meaning did you give the situation?

How did memory, context, goals, or previous experience influence your interpretation?

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6. How might another person have perceived it differently?

Generate at least one reasonable alternative experience.

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7. Did your perception pull you toward something or away from something?

What did you approach, avoid, delay, seek, protect, or escape?

One Sentence to Remember

"Before I judge my reaction, I can ask what I actually perceived - and what I may have missed."

7. What Comes Next

Lesson 2 adds a second layer to the Approach/Avoid framework. We do not begin with a complete copy of the world. We begin with limited sensory access, selective attention, and interpretation.

WORLD -> SENSES -> ATTENTION ->
PERCEPTION -> PREDICTION ->
APPROACH / AVOID -> ACTION
Lesson 3 will focus on prediction and expectations.

Key Takeaways

- The physical world contains more information than humans can detect or consciously process.
- Our senses provide useful but selective access to the environment.
- The traditional five senses are only part of the human sensory system.
- Attention determines which available information receives priority.
- Memory, context, goals, bodily state, and prior learning influence interpretation.
- Two people can encounter the same event and experience it differently.
- Approach and avoidance are responses to perceived meaning, not to a perfect recording of reality.

Selected Research Foundations

This lesson draws on established work in sensation, perception, attention, and predictive processing. Suggested starting points include:

- Goldstein, E. B. (2019). Sensation and Perception (10th ed.). Cengage.
- Kandel, E. R., et al. (2021). Principles of Neural Science (6th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Posner, M. I. (2012). Attention in a Social World. Oxford University Press.
- Clark, A. (2013). Whatever next? Predictive brains, situated agents, and the future of cognitive science. Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 36(3), 181-204.
- Friston, K. (2010). The free-energy principle: a unified brain theory? Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 11, 127-138. (Useful predictive-processing context; not a complete account of perception.)

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