

Operational Definitions



Psychologists are generally interested in what goes on in people's minds. This presents them with a problem, because we can't see what goes on in people's minds. We can only see and measure their behaviour. This means that psychologists often have to work out ways of measuring mental processes (which can't be seen) based on behavioural processes (which can). In technical terms, psychologists use **operational definitions** of mental processes.

An operational definition is a description of a variable given in terms of how it is actually measured.

This can be a difficult idea to grasp, so here are some examples...further down the list are some psychological variables for you to operationalise.

Psychological variable (the thing we <i>can't</i> see)	Operational definition (the thing we <i>can</i> see, that allows us to have an idea about the thing we can't see). NB. these are examples, others are possible.
Memory	The number of words correctly recalled from a list
Intelligence	IQ test score - the number of problems of various types correctly solved within a specific time limit.
Interference (Stroop task)	Printing colour words in conflicting ink colours.
Aggression	
Stress	
Reading ability	
Depression	