



Unit 2 Glossary

The below terms may be useful in Unit 2:

Conscious/Consciousness: If something is conscious, there is ‘something it is like’ to be that thing (Nagel, 1974). By default, we use ‘conscious’ to refer to **phenomenal consciousness, or subjective experience**. We are not talking about *intelligence* or *sense of self* or other related concepts – we are focusing on whether something has the *capacity for experience*. So when it ‘feels like’ something to be a conscious system, there is a conscious experience happening. Put another way, ‘consciousness’ is the thing that goes away when we go into deep, dreamless sleep – though there is some debate around whether consciousness is an on/off phenomenon or can have more [borderline cases](#). Importantly, conscious experience can happen without intelligence (e.g. some animals) and vice-versa, and the experience need not involve emotional content or even a sense of self; any kind of conscious experience will do.

Consciousness – Access Consciousness: states or contents of mind that are **available for report and reasoning, but that are not necessarily experienced subjectively**. This contrasts with phenomenal consciousness (the ‘what-it’s-like’ feel), though there is debate around how they may interact. In access consciousness, availability for report/reasoning/control is a hallmark; mere influence on behavior is not enough. For more on these distinctions, see Block [here](#).

Functionalism: a theory which holds that consciousness turns on **functional organisation**. The functional organisation of a system i.e. the relationships between its possible internal states and its inputs and outputs, determines whether it is conscious. This means – roughly – that consciousness depends on what a system does, not on what it is made out of (Putnam, 1975). Applying this,

systems with the same functional organisation have the same experiences even if they have different substrates.

Functionalism, Computational: the claim that the kind of functional organisation that matters for mind in general, and for consciousness in particular, is computational in nature (Putnam, 1988; Shagrir, 2010). More [specifically](#), that consciousness depends only on the manipulation of information by an algorithm, regardless of whether the system performing these computations is made up of neurons, silicon, or any other physical substrate. There is some debate as to what kind of computation is involved, as Anil Seth [explains](#).

Qualia: the introspectively accessible, phenomenal aspects of mental states – the ‘what-it’s-like’ character of experience (e.g. the redness of red, the sting of pain). In standard usage, qualia name the felt qualities of perception and sensation – not their functional or representational roles. For more, see the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [here](#).

Substrate Independence: the claim that the same kind of mental states (including conscious states) can occur in systems with a wide range of physical substrates (Seth, 2025). This idea can also be referred to as ‘substrate flexibility’ as a reference to the idea that (conscious) mental states are not (necessarily) tied to carbon-based biological substrates (Kirkpatrick, 2022).

Zombie, Philosophical: a philosophical thought experiment – a being that behaves exactly like a human, but lacks subjective experience.

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