

Perspicacity

Perspicacity (also called **perspicaciousness**) is a penetrating discernment (from the Latin *perspicacitās*, meaning throughsightedness, discrimination)—a clarity of vision or intellect which provides a deep understanding and insight.^[1] It takes the concept of wisdom deeper in the sense that it denotes a keenness of sense and intelligence applied to insight. It has been described as a deeper level of internalization.^[2] Another definition refers to it as the "ability to recognize subtle differences between similar objects or ideas".^[3]

The artist René Magritte illustrated the quality in his 1936 painting *Perspicacity*. The picture shows an artist at work who studies his subject intently: it is an egg. But the painting which he is creating is not of an egg; it is an adult bird in flight.^[4]

Perspicacity is also used to indicate practical wisdom in the areas of politics and finance.^{[5][6]} Being perspicacious about other people, rather than having false illusions, is a sign of good mental health.^[7] The quality is needed in psychotherapists who engage in person-to-person dialogue and counselling of the mentally ill.^[8]

Perspicacity is different from *acuity*, which also describes a keen insight, since it does not include physical abilities such as sight or hearing.^[3]

In an article dated October 7, 1966, the journal *Science* discussed NASA scientist-astronaut program recruitment efforts:

To quote an Academy brochure, the quality most needed by a scientist-astronaut is "perspicacity." He must, the brochure says, be able to quickly pick out, from among the thousands of things he sees, those that are significant, and to synthesize observations and develop and test working hypotheses.^[9]

Concept

In 17th-century Europe, René Descartes devised systematic rules for clear thinking in his work *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii* (Rules for the direction of natural intelligence). In Descartes' scheme, intelligence consisted of two faculties: perspicacity, which provided an understanding or intuition of distinct detail; and sagacity, which enabled reasoning about the details in order to make deductions. Rule 9 was *De Perspicacitate Intuitionis* (On the Perspicacity of Intuition).^[10] He summarised the rule as

Oportet ingenii aciem ad res minimas et maxime faciles totam convertere, atque in illis diutius immorari, donec assuescamus veritatem distincte et perspicue intueri.

We should totally focus the vision of the natural intelligence on the smallest and easiest things, and we should dwell on them for a long time, so long, until we have become accustomed to intuiting the truth distinctly and perspicuously.

In his study of the elements of wisdom, the modern psychometrician Robert Sternberg identified perspicacity as one of its six components or dimensions; the other five being reasoning, sagacity, learning, judgement and the expeditious use of information.^[11] In his analysis, the perspicacious individual is someone who

...has intuition; can offer solutions that are on the side of right and truth; is able to see through things — read between the lines; has the ability to understand and interpret his or her environment.

— Robert J. Sternberg, *Wisdom: its nature, origins, and development*

See also

- Neuro-linguistic programming
- Organizational politics
- Stress management
- Time management
- Personality
- Temperament

References

1. Em Olivia Bevis (1989), *Curriculum Building in Nursing*, p. 134, ISBN 978-0-7637-0941-9
2. Lyles, Dick (2010). *Pearls of Perspicacity: Proven Wisdom to Help You Find Career Satisfaction and Success*. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc. pp. xiv. ISBN 9781450244794.
3. Strutzel, Dan (2018-10-09). *Vocabulary Power for Business: 500 Words You Need to Transform Your Career and Your Life: 500 Words You Need to Transform Your Career and Your Life* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=A2h5DwAAQBAJ&q=Perspicacity+definition&pg=PT18>). Gildan Media LLC aka G&D Media. ISBN 9781722521158.
4. Frederick Grinnell (2009), *Everyday Practice of Science*, Oxford University Press, p. 84, ISBN 978-0-19-506457-5
5. Baumeister, Andrea T.; Horton, John (1996). *Literature and the Political Imagination* (<https://archive.org/details/literaturepoliti00hort>). London: Routledge. pp. 13 (<https://archive.org/details/literaturepoliti00hort/page/n23>). ISBN 0415129141.
6. Sheng, Andrew (2009). *From Asian to Global Financial Crisis: An Asian Regulator's View of Unfettered Finance in the 1990s and 2000s* (<https://archive.org/details/fromasiantogloba00shen>). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp. 395 (<https://archive.org/details/fromasiantogloba00shen/page/n410>). ISBN 9780521118644.
7. Joiner, Thomas E.; Kistner, Janet A.; Stellrecht, Nadia E.; Merrill, Katherine A. (May 2006), "On Seeing Clearly and Thriving: Interpersonal Perspicacity as Adaptive (Not Depressive) Realism (Or Where Three Theories Meet)", *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, **25** (5): 542–564, doi:10.1521/jscp.2006.25.5.542 (<https://doi.org/10.1521%2Fjscp.2006.25.5.542>), ISSN 0736-7236 (<https://www.worldcat.org/issn/0736-7236>)
8. Blaine Fowers (2005), *Virtue and psychology*, American Psychological Association, pp. 107–128, ISBN 978-1-59147-251-3
9. Carter LJ (7 October 1966), "Scientist-Astronauts: Only the "Perspicacious" Need Apply", *Science*, **154** (3745): 133–135, Bibcode:1966Sci...154..133C (<https://ui.adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/1966Sci...154..133C>), doi:10.1126/science.154.3745.133 (<https://doi.org/10.1126%2Fscience.154.3745.133>), PMID 17740099 (<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17740099>)
10. René Descartes, edited and translated by George Heffernan (1998), "Regula IX De Perspicacitate Intuitionis", *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii*, Rodopi, p. 122, ISBN 978-90-420-0138-1
11. Robert J. Sternberg (1990), *Wisdom*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 146, 157, ISBN 978-0-521-36718-9

Retrieved from "<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Perspicacity&oldid=986545315>"

This page was last edited on 1 November 2020, at 14:56 (UTC).

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy. Wikipedia® is a registered trademark of the Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., a non-profit organization.

perspicacity

Contents

English

[Etymology](#)

[Pronunciation](#)

[Noun](#)

[Related terms](#)

[Translations](#)

[References](#)

English

Etymology

perspicac(ious) + *-ity*, from [Middle French](#) *perspicacité*, from [Latin](#) *perspicācitās* (“sharpsightedness, discrimination”).

Pronunciation

- Hyphenation: per·spi·cac·i·ty
- ([UK](#)) IPA^(key): /ˌpɜː.spɪˈkæ.sə.tiː/
- ([US](#)) enPR: pûrˈspɪˌkæsˈə.tē, IPA^(key): /ˌpɜː.ɹ.spɪˈkæ.sə.tiː/

Noun

perspicacity (*usually uncountable, plural perspicacities*)

1. Acute discernment or understanding; insight.

- **1904**, Jack London, *The Sea-Wolf*, ch. 8:

"I understand," I said. "The fact is that you have the money." His face brightened. He seemed pleased at my **perspicacity**.

- **2019** April 23, Heller McAlpin, "In McEwan's Latest, The 'Machine' Is Too Much Like You", in *NPR*^[1] (<https://www.npr.org/2019/04/23/714887136/in-mcewans-latest-the-machine-is-too-much-like-you>).

McEwan certainly has a flair for unusual points of view. Adam, like the baby-in-waiting who narrates *Nutshell*, is an extraordinarily smart, well-informed, and unorthodox character who catches his supposed caretakers off-guard with his **perspicacity**.

2. The human faculty or power to mentally grasp or understand clearly.

- **1856**, "Selections from the Letters of Robert Southey," *The Quarterly Review*, vol. 98, p. 458:

His very veneration for his father-in-law, combined as it is with a total want of the most ordinary **perspicacity**, is an additional disqualification.

- **1888**, "Review of *La suggestion mentale* by H. Bourru and P. Burot," *The American Journal of Psychology*, vol. 1 no. 3, p. 503:

As the former consists in the transmission of psychic states inappreciable to the normal **perspicacity** or senses, the transfer cannot pass through the medium of intelligence.

3. (*obsolete*) Keen eyesight.

- **1833**, John Harrison Curtis, *A Treatise on the Physiology and Diseases of the Eye*, London, Longman, p. 138:

Attentive consideration of the phenomena of vision has led to the invention of artificial aids by which the sight may be wonderfully strengthened and preserved, and man endowed at once with the **perspicacity** of the eagle or the minute scrutiny of the insect.

Related terms

- perspicacious
- perspicaciousness
- perspicuity

Translations

Acute discernment or understanding; insight

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Bulgarian: <u>проницателност</u> (bg) (<i>pronicatelnost</i>)▪ Catalan: <u>perspicàcia</u> <i>f</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Latvian: <u>vērīgums</u>▪ Lithuanian: <u>nuovokumas</u>▪ Persian: <u>تدبير</u> |
|--|--|

- Chinese:
 - Mandarin: 洞察力 (zh) (dongchali)
- Danish: skarpsindighed
- Dutch: verloop (nl)
- Esperanto: sagaco
- Finnish: tarkkanäköisyys (fi)
- French: perspicacité (fr) *f*
- German: Weitblick, Scharfsinn (de) *m*.
- Greek: οξύδέρκεια (el) *f* (oxydérkeia)
- Hungarian: éleselméjű
- Indonesian: kecerdikan (id)
- Italian: perspicacità *f*
- Japanese: 洞察 (ja) (dōsatsu)
- Korean: 안식 (ko) (ansik)
- Latin: perspicacitās *f*
- Polish: przenikliwość (pl)
- Portuguese: perspicácia (pt) *f*
- Romanian: perspicacitate (ro) *f*
- Russian: проницательность (ru) (pronícátel'nost')
- Slovak: prezieravosť
- Slovene: pronicljivost
- Spanish: perspicacia (es) *f*
- Swedish: klarsynthet
- Tagalog: talisik, katalisikan
- Turkish: cesaretli (tr)
- Ukrainian: проницливість (uk) (pronyklyvist')
- Urdu: زیرکی

The human faculty or power to mentally grasp or understand clearly

- Esperanto: sagaco
- German: Auffassungsgabe (de) *f*, Auffassungsvermögen *n*, Scharfsinn (de) *m*.
- Russian: проницательность (ru) *n* (pronícátel'nost')

Keen eyesight

- Finnish: tarkkanäköisyys (fi)

The translations below need to be checked and inserted above into the appropriate translation tables, removing any numbers. Numbers do not necessarily match those in definitions. See instructions at [Wiktionary:Entry layout § Translations](#).

Translations to be checked

- Latin: perspicacitās
- Slovak: ostroumnosť

References

- Webster, Noah (1828) , “perspicacity (<http://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/perspicacity>)”, in *An American Dictionary of the English Language*
- perspicacity (<http://www.websters1913.com/words/Perspicacity>) in *Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, G. & C. Merriam, 1913.
- “perspicacity (<https://www.dictionary.com/browse/perspicacity>)” in *Dictionary.com Unabridged*, Dictionary.com, LLC, 1995–present.
- "perspicacity" (<http://dictionary.cambridge.org/define.asp?key=59101&dict=CALD>) in *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)
- Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition (1989)
- Random House Webster's Unabridged Electronic Dictionary* (1987-1996)

This page was last edited on 24 October 2020, at 02:33.

Text is available under the Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike License; additional terms may apply. By using this site, you agree to the Terms of Use and Privacy Policy.