

Mental Model



People get frustrated when objects are too displaced from their existing perception or past experience...

A **Mental Model** represents a person's thought process for how something works (i.e., a person's understanding of the surrounding world). Mental models are based on incomplete facts, past experiences, and even intuitive perceptions. They help shape actions and behavior, influence what people pay attention to in complicated situations, and define how people approach and solve problems. Mismatched mental models are common, especially with designs that try something new. Complying with pre-existing mental models as appropriate, while understanding that mental models are in flux, is extremely critical for the success of any design.

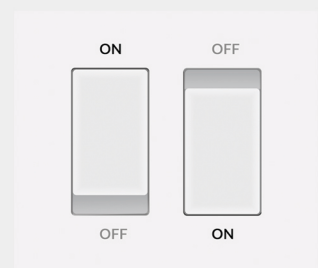
Example 1



Imagine that you've never seen or used a Kindle, but someone gifted one to you and told you that you can read books on it. Before you even turn it on, you have a mental model in your head of what reading a book on the Kindle will be like - turning a page, or using a bookmark - drawing from your experience of physical books. Once you read a couple of books on it, whichever mental model you had in your head before will start to change and adjust to reflect your experience of e-reading.

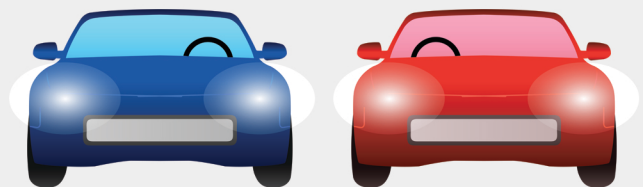
Example 2

Consider a light switch. A typical mental model in most parts of the world might be that when one flips a switch down, it turns on the light. But in the US, it works the opposite way. This can be confusing or frustrating for people from other cultures who are in the US for the first time.



Example 3

We use mental models to survive. The habit to look for traffic when about to cross the street is a mental model. We develop this habit within the context of the location where we grow up. In the United States, where people drive on the right side of the road, one tends to look first left then right then left before crossing. If the same person goes to England and follows this mental model they can potentially get killed!



For more on Mental Models, visit:

- <https://goo.gl/937bhf>
- <https://goo.gl/j0uGSq>

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