

Introduction to NLP

Just imagine what you would do if your bread machine arrived without instructions.

That of course, pales in comparison to the immense complexity of our brains (unimaginably more bake cycles).

Each of us happen to possess in our skulls, the most sophisticated computers ever conceived of and no one thought to provide instructions. No wonder changing how we do the simplest task, often meets with failure.

If you climbed behind the wheel of a car for the very first time and had no instructions to guide you, how far do you think you'd get before driving into a ditch or up a telephone pole.

So, how do NLPers create the knowledge necessary to learn how to operate our own minds?

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) studies the structure of how humans think and experience the world. Obviously, the structure of something so subjective does not lend itself to precise, statistical formulae but instead leads to models of how these things work. From these models, techniques for quickly and effectively changing thoughts, behaviors and beliefs that limit you have been developed.

Warning! The following paragraph contains big, ugly, hard-to-understand words developed by a linguist. This is the only downside to NLP I know of and we're staying up nights trying to fix it. Parental guidance is suggested.

Many of the models in NLP were created by studying people who did things exquisitely well. Models such as [meta-model](#), [metaprogram](#), [sensory acuity](#), [Milton-model](#), [representational systems and submodalities](#) among others, provide a diverse set of tools for creating change in yourself and others.

Someone who wanted to create a model for learning to drive a car really well, might approach an expert in the field something like this - Instead of asking an expert driver, "How do you drive?" ("Very well, thank you."), they would be concentrating not on the content of what they did but on the underlying structure such as how they represent driving in their mind, the beliefs and attitudes they had about driving, the strategies they used in making decisions, how often they change their oil, (skip that last one) among other factors.

Let's use something called submodalities as an example of how a model works. By understanding how we perceive the world through our five senses, we can then understand how some people can respond very resourcefully in a situation and others do not. Once you learn how those who remain resourceful set up their representations, then it's a simple matter to teach others to do the same thing.

The Example: Imagine seeing an enormous spider dangling directly in front of your face. Now clear your mind (sorry, didn't want to leave that image hanging around). A common way for people to have a phobic reaction to spiders or anything related to them, is to picture a spider completely oversized and far too close in their minds.

Spiders are tiny, well-mannered creatures that are far more frightened of you than you should be of them but try telling that to someone with that particular phobia.

So, why don't these phobic people notice the images they're creating? The popular belief is that we don't pay much attention to what's going on in our unconscious. If you considered the enormous amount of information your brain has to process each day, it's probably best that we don't spend much time dwelling on it (otherwise, we would probably sit around babbling and drooling and eventually starve to death).

Well, what do we do about our friend with the phobia, Extra-strength cans of Raid for a house warming gift?

NLPers ask the question, "If another person can have fun playing with their pet spider, what can we learn about them that we could teach the phobic person so they can play with spiders, too?" (Or something like that). The spider-lover would most likely have an image representing spiders that was proportionally correct and at a reasonable distance and possibly other factors not worth getting into right now. Knowing the difference, the NLPer can use one of many techniques to help the phobic person relearn their reaction to spiders so that it is similar in nature to the spider-lover's (hopefully less of the lover part).

The above example may sound complicated but phobia treatments often take less than half an hour. An powerful change with a minimal investment of time and effort.

NLP is based on many useful [presuppositions](#) that support the attitude that change is imminent. One of the most important is, NLP is about what works, not what should work. In other words, if what you're doing isn't working, try something else, anything else, regardless of whether what you had been doing should have worked. Flexibility is the key element in a given system, the one who is most likely to do well responds to changing (or unchanging) circumstances. That's one reason NLP has made so much progress in an area where such is not the norm. Innovators try out things with little regard as to its "truth" or "reality", NLP is much more interested in results and giving people what they want from life (sappy yes, but "true" nonetheless).

This is the end of the Introduction to NLP. What you have just read is very incomplete but hopefully gives you a taste of what NLP is about.

I highly recommend you continue your investigation of how NLP can enhance all aspects of your life from improving your relationships with loved ones, learning to teach effectively, gaining a stronger sense of self esteem, greater motivation, better understanding of communication, enhancing your business or career, bending steel bars in a single bound and an enormous amount of other things that involve the use of your brain.

We do have an online bookstore with books, audio-cassettes and videotapes available and also a special introductory package for those new to NLP. We maintain a list of many training centers and information on events and conferences throughout the world if you're interested in a first hand experience. For some hands-on experimentation with NLP, we have our Exercises and Experiences section which give you a set of guidelines to follow to experience an NLP change.

We want to make this site as useful to everyone as we can and encourage any [suggestions or comments](#) you may have.

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Presuppositions

Presuppositions are beliefs that someone practicing NLP will find useful for creating changes in themselves and the world, more easily and effectively. The emphasis here should be on "useful" not whether each one could be proven to be "true". Practitioners of NLP often include different presuppositions in their list but what follows are the most common.

Communication is more than what you're saying.

The body communicates constantly in ways that go far beyond words.

People already have all the resources they need to effect a change.

The resources just weren't lucky enough to be in the right place at the right time.

Choice is better than no choice.

Need I say more?

Every behavior serves a positive intention and a context in which it has value.

The behavior may never lead to that positive intention but that part of you can learn new behaviors that do. As to a context that has value, imagine overeating at an expensive brunch (got your moneys worth didn't you?). Go with me on this one, it really helps.

There is no such thing as failure, only feedback.

Every response is useful, you may hate the response but the knowledge you gain from it is valuable.

If someone can do something, then it can be modeled and taught to anyone else.

That even includes me.

The map is not the territory.

We cannot contain every bit of information that comes to us in the world, so we have to create a "map of the territory" and then refer to the map for our information (see representational systems). By changing a person's map, we change their reality.

The meaning of your communication is the response you get.

If you get slapped, try anything else.

If you aren't getting the response you want, try something different.

See above.

People work perfectly.

No one is "broken". They are functioning perfectly in what they are doing now (even if it is ruining their life), it's a matter of finding how they function now, so that we can help them change into doing something they consider more desirable.

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Representational Systems & Submodalities

The representational systems in NLP are simply enough the five senses. We represent the world using the visual (images), auditory (sounds), kinesthetic (touch and internal feelings), gustatory (tastes) and olfactory (smells) senses. We picture ourselves lying on a sunny beach, hear the voice of the lifeguard yelling, feel the sensation only sand in your bathing suit can produce, taste the soggy egg salad sandwiches we brought for lunch and smell the aroma of the surf wafting into our nostrils. Our thinking consists of these images, sounds, feelings and usually to a lesser extent, tastes and smells. The entirety of our experiences have been recreated through these senses in our memories and govern our capabilities and beliefs.

Curiously enough, our predominant representational system in a given context often shows up in our language, for example: Responding to the statement: I think the Jensen project is going well.

Visual: Yep, looks good to me.

Auditory: I been hearing good things about it.

Kinesthetic: I feel good about the whole project.

Olfactory: Smells like a winner to me.

Gustatory: I can taste the victory.

It's no wonder smells and tastes are less commonly used considering how hard they are to work into conversation.

The qualities or attributes of the representations you make using your five senses are submodalities. For example, make a picture of someone you love in your mind. Now, make the colors more intense and notice how it affects your response to it. Now make it black and white and notice your response. Return it to its original shades and hue and bring the image closer. Now move it farther out. Return the picture to its original state, noticing how each of those experiments affected your response. Submodalities are the fine tuning to your representations and can be used to create powerful changes.

The interesting thing to note here is that once you understand that you create your internal world, you realize you can change it.

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Meta-Model

Very simply, the meta-model is set of questions designed to find the explicit meaning in a person's communication.

For example:

He hurt me.

Meta-Modeler: Who hurt you?

Bob hurt me.

Meta-Modeler: How did he hurt you?

He wouldn't take out the trash like I asked him to.

Another example:

I can't believe he's like that!

Meta-Modeler: Who?

Mel Gibson.

Meta-Modeler: What's he like?

He's so amazingly gorgeous!

Meta-Modeler: Hey, what about me?! (oops, that not Meta-model)

Many of us would have assumed we knew what was meant by "He hurt me." or "I can't believe he's like that", based on our own experiences. By having the ability to find other people's meaning in their communication, we can be more capable in communicating with them.

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Sensory Acuity

A person's thought process is very closely tied with their physiology. A dog senses your fear: how did he know if you didn't tell him. If a friend is depressed, most of us can tell without even talking with them. We pick up clues from their body: slumped shoulders, eyes downcast, head down, lack of animation (and in extreme cases, a loaded pistol held to the head). Sensory acuity takes these observations beyond the more obviously recognizable clues and uses the physical feedback in addition to someone's words to gain as much from communication as

possible.

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Milton-Model

A set of linguistic patterns derived from Milton Erickson, the father of modern hypnotherapy. These language patterns are used to help guide someone without interfering with how they are experiencing it in their minds. For example, "Think of time you were laughing." It doesn't define when or how hard you were laughing so it applies to everyone (I hope). The Milton-model helps with maintaining rapport and is often used in hypnotic or trance state sessions.

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Metaprograms

Metaprograms are filters through which we perceive the world. The old maxim, is the glass half full or half empty (or just fluidically challenged) is an example.

Another example would be how two different people might approach an argument. A person with what we would call an "away from" strategy would be likely to be finding any way to get away from the conflict. Someone using a "toward" strategy would be more likely to be heading toward a specific goal, perhaps of finding an amicable solution to the conflict. The primary difference between the two being, when you're moving away from something, you never know what you may back into.

When you change these filters, it can dramatically change how we approach situations and how we perceive the world.

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