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Mental Flexibility

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Synonyms

[Cognitive flexibility](#); [Set shifting](#)

Definition

Mental flexibility is the ability to shift a course of thought or action according to the changing demands of a situation. Flexibility can involve perceptual, cognitive, and/or behavioral response dimensions that allow an individual to abandon a previous response set or pattern in order to generate an alternate that is better suited to the requirements of the situation at hand. It is one of the hallmark executive functions attributed primarily to the frontal lobes and is one of the key attributes that underlies the capacity for creative thought.

On cognitive tests, mental flexibility can refer to the ability to track and systematically alternate between two response sets (e.g., as measured by fluency tests, the trail making tests) or to switch between attending or responding to different concepts or modalities (e.g., card sorting tests, Stroop color-word test, and interference tests). These cognitive-switching tasks are often sensitive to even subtle frontal-lobe dysfunction.

Cross-References

- ▶ [Executive Function](#)
- ▶ [Semantic Fluency](#)
- ▶ [Stroop Color and Word Test \(Children's Version\)](#)
- ▶ [Stroop Color Word Test \(Adult\)](#)
- ▶ [Stroop Effect](#)
- ▶ [Stroop Neuropsychological Screening Test](#)
- ▶ [Trail Making Test](#)
- ▶ [Verbal Fluency](#)
- ▶ [Wisconsin Card Sorting Test](#)