

SCIENCE AS A METHOD FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

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We can begin with the assumption that you begin with a set of assumptions, beliefs, generalizations, conclusions, theories, etc.; which are based on prior experiences, observations, etc.; based on prior assumptions, etc.; etc.

In dealing with a problem or situation you want to understand better and/or solve, you can follow these steps:

1. Identify your assumptions, theories, etc.
2. Clarify them by defining your terms, etc.
3. Develop clear answerable questions that you then ask in order to make observations that will help you answer them.
4. Make your observations in a calm, 'unprejudiced' manner.
5. Report your observations as accurately as possible and in such a way as to answer the questions that you asked to begin with.
6. Revise any assumptions, theories, etc., held before the observations were made, in light of the observations made and the answers obtained.
7. Begin again, and again, and again...¹

Implications of this approach include:

- Our 'knowledge' evolves in a circular or spiral manner. You can 'begin' at any point in these steps when working to solve a problem. However, the decision to ask questions and make observations usually seems to arise when you encounter something unexpected, due to some problematic assumption(s) you hold.
- Our conclusions are held tentatively, subject to further revision.
- Our conclusions are more or less supported or refuted; nothing is 'proven'.

These steps can be summarized by the following questions, which we do well to ask when we want to use science as a method for everyday life:

What do I (and you) mean? (Steps 1 and 2)

How do I (and you) know? (Steps 3, 4 and 5)

What then? (Steps 6 and 7)²

What then? Practice using science as a method for everyday life and find out!

Notes

1. Modified version of p. 49 of Johnson, Wendell. *People in Quandaries*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1946; reprinted by San Francisco, CA: International Society for General Semantics, 1989.
2. Modified version of p. 38 of Johnson, Wendell and Dorothy Moeller. *Living with Change: The Semantics of Coping*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1972.