

Workshops:

1. Behaviour

2. Emotions

3. Anxiety

4. Assertiveness

5. Worrying

6. Thinking 1

7. Thinking 2

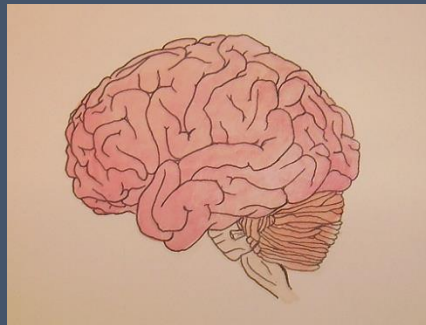
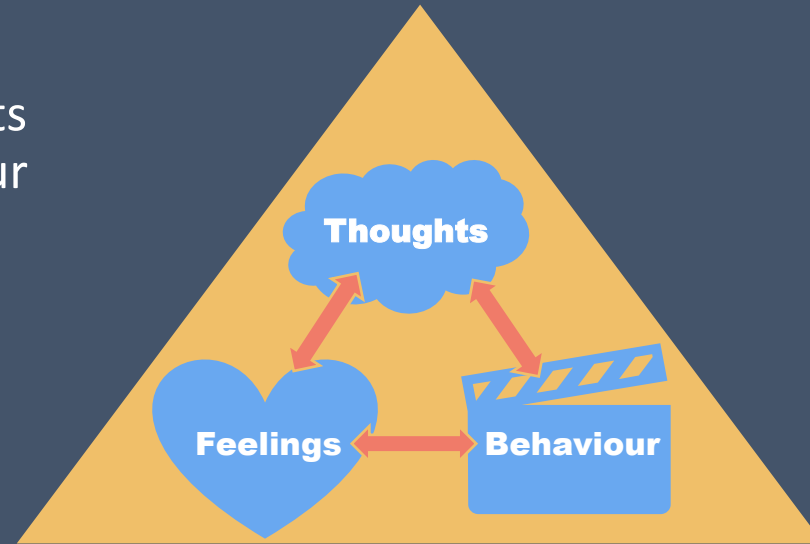
Thinking 1

Thinking good, thinking bad



Thoughts and Cognition - I

Now we are at the top of our CBT triangle. Cognition is just a fancy-pants term for processes underlying how our brains make sense of the world and determine how we respond.

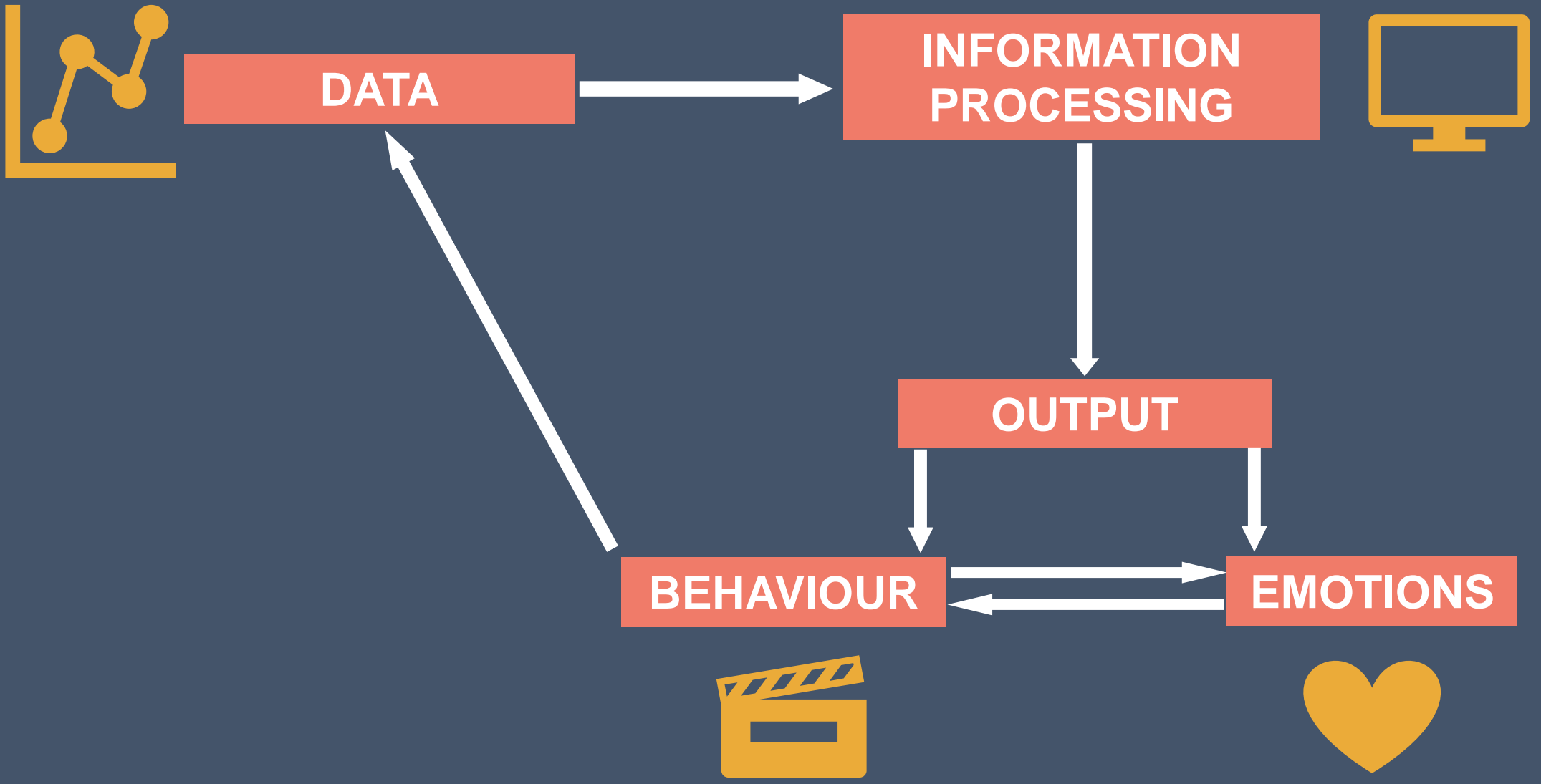


As Robert Frost wryly observed..

“The brain is a wonderful organ; it starts the moment you get up in the morning and does not stop until you get to the office.”

Thoughts and Cognition - II

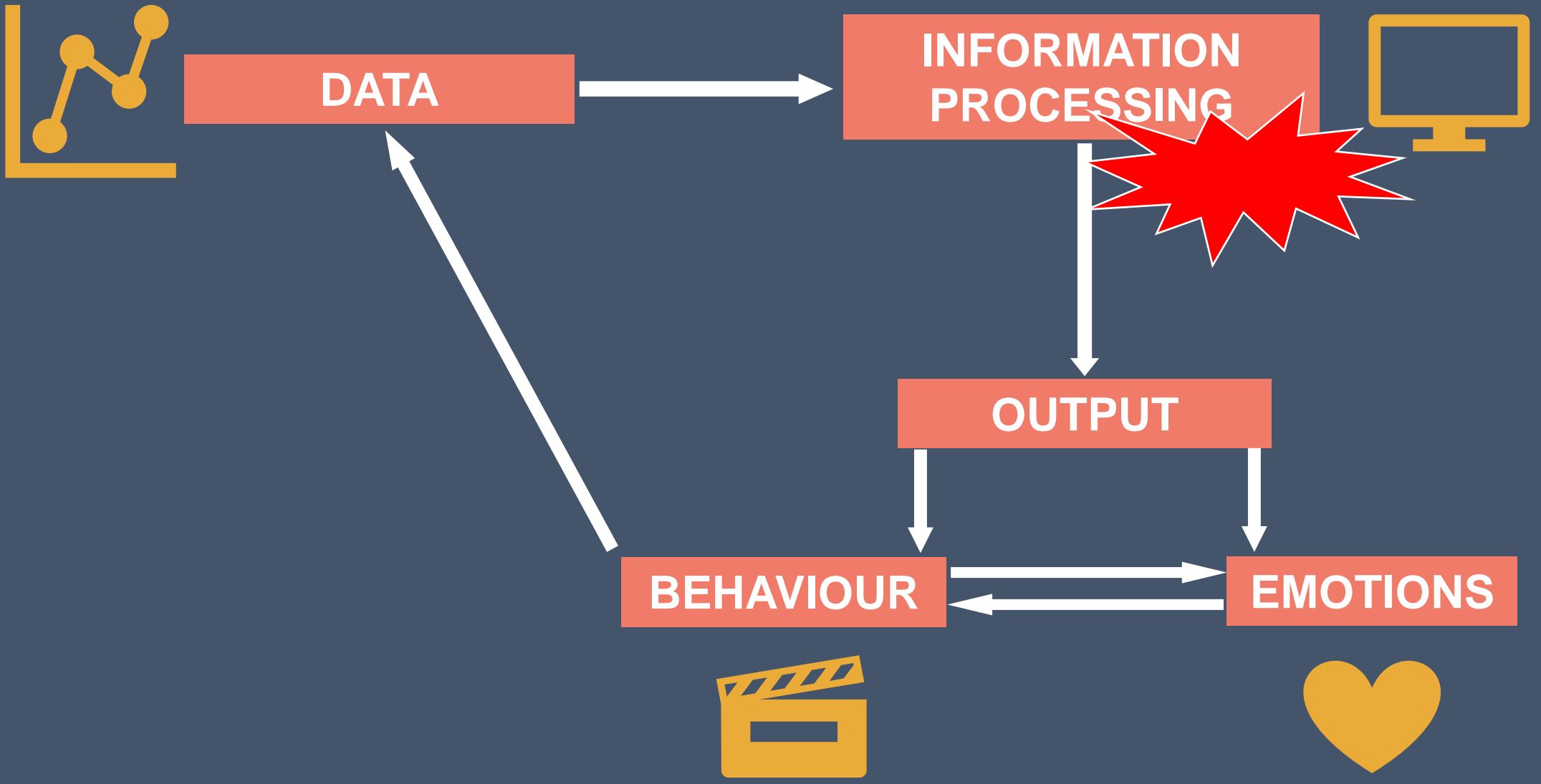
- It is helpful to understand how our brain work in terms of information processing.
- Data (or “information”) is received through our sensory systems (including from those inside our bodies “reporting” on how things are going with our day to day bodily functioning).
- This information is sorted and interpreted by our brains, and appropriate responses are produced.
- This is illustrated in the following slide.



Thoughts and Cognition - III

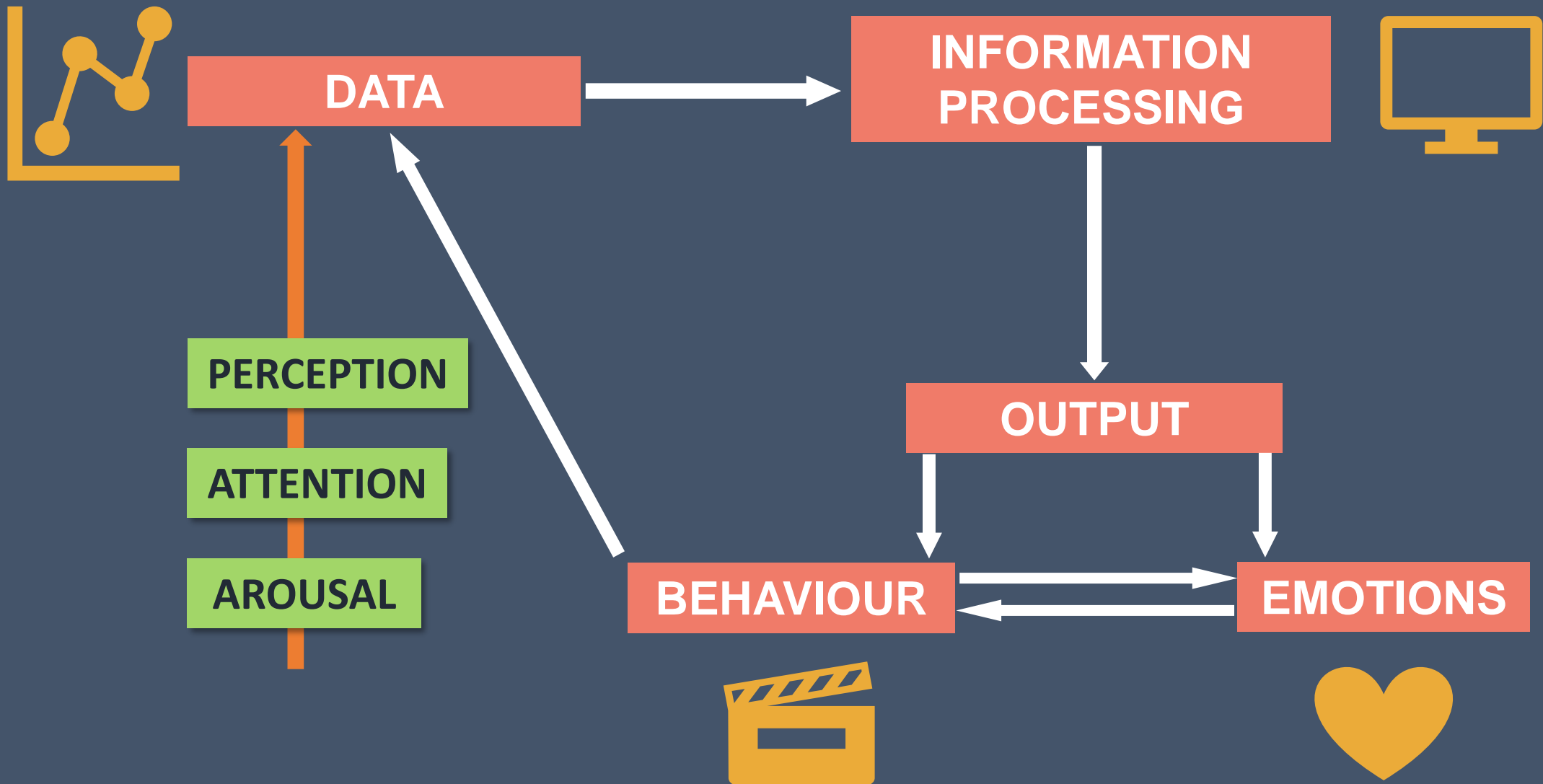
- You will see that it is a circular and continuous process and, contrary to the earlier quote about starting when you wake up, it is a 24-7 business.
- The brain uses all kinds of tricks and shortcuts to be as efficient as possible, such as templates to gain a rapid understanding of what is going on.
- However, sometimes these processes become distorted or biased in some way, leading to faulty and unhelpful outputs.





Attention and Arousal

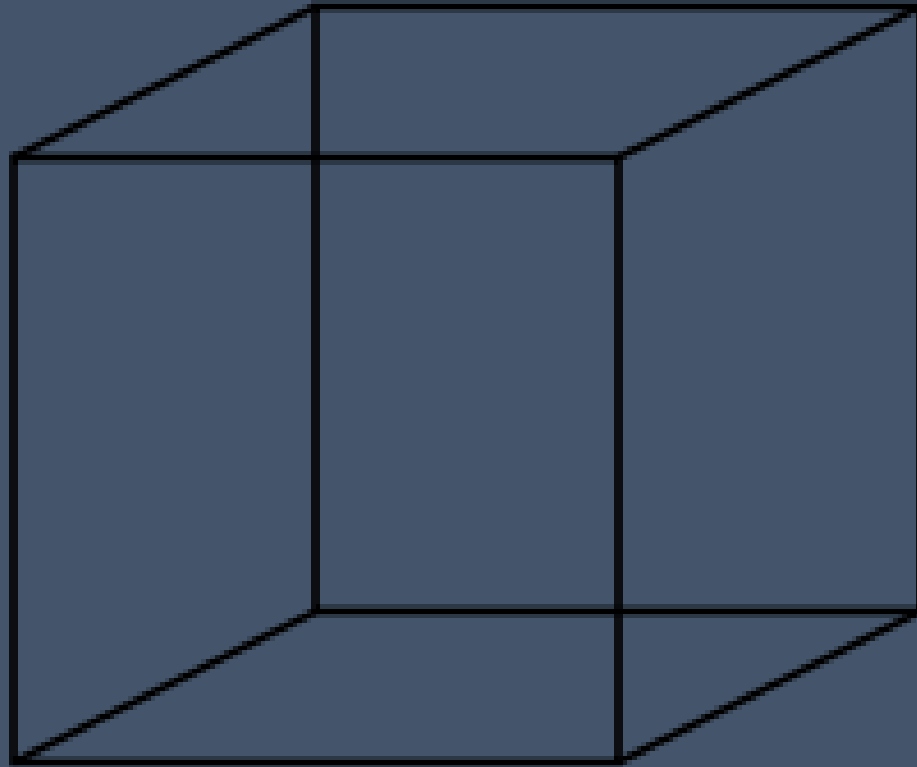
- Just to complicate the picture further, we need to consider the important roles played by **attention** and **arousal**.
- We can only be aware of a small proportion of all the data that our brains have to cope with, so there is a lot of filtering that goes on to protect us from overload. This is our **attention** – it tends to be drawn towards the things around us that we find most important and relevant.
- The amount of data we can attend to and process depends on how awake and alert we are – this is our **arousal**. It is one reason why we should not drive or operate machinery if we are drowsy.



Take a look at the image on the following slide.

Just let your eyes rest on the image and notice what happens.





Did you notice how the perspective of the cube changed?

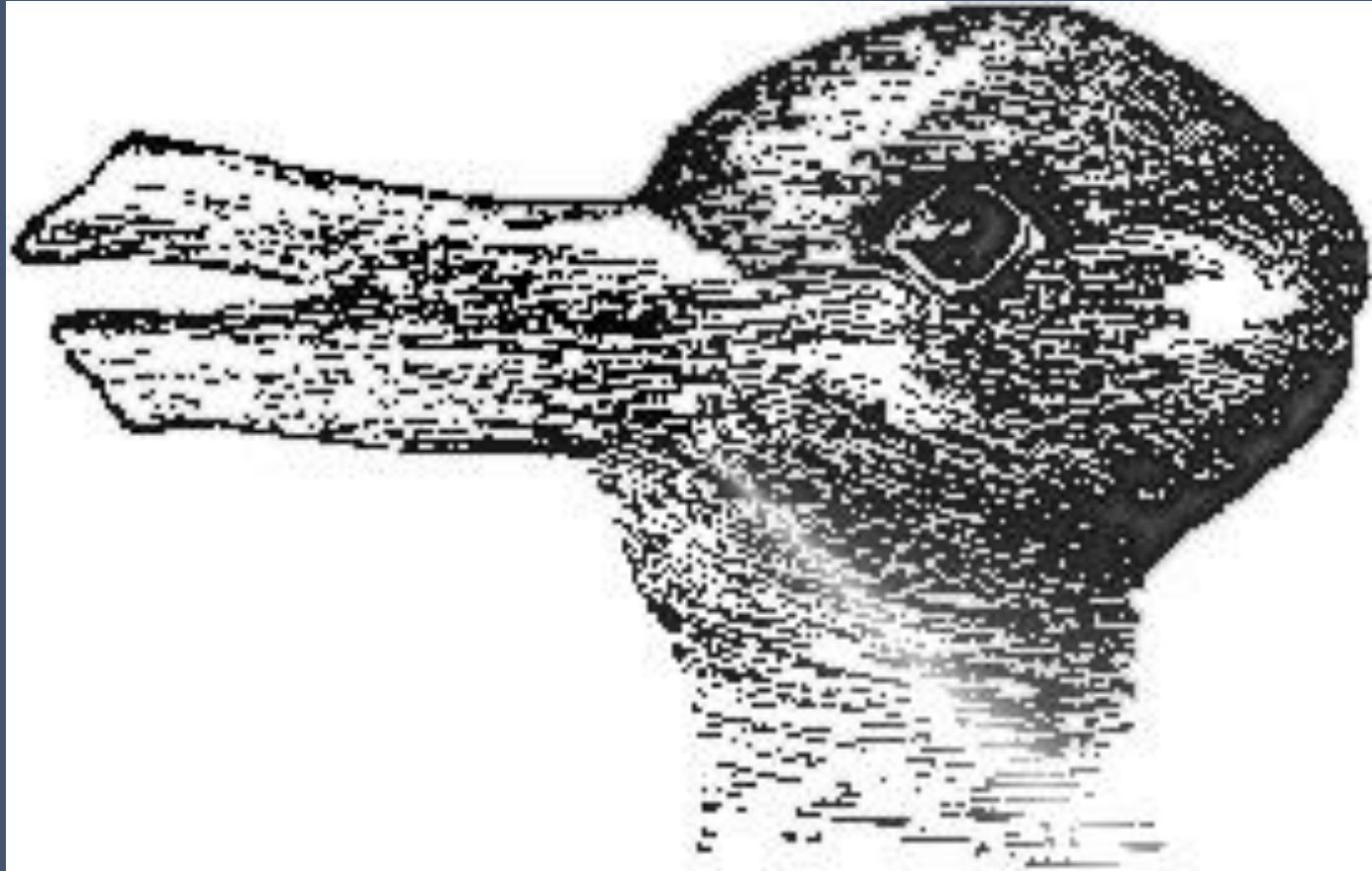
Is there a right and wrong way to view the image?

This is a nice illustration of how our brains try to make sense of information.

Creating “reality” is an active process - our brains are not just blank screens passively receiving images as if the world was a film.

[The image is known as the Necker Cube]

Here is another famous illusion



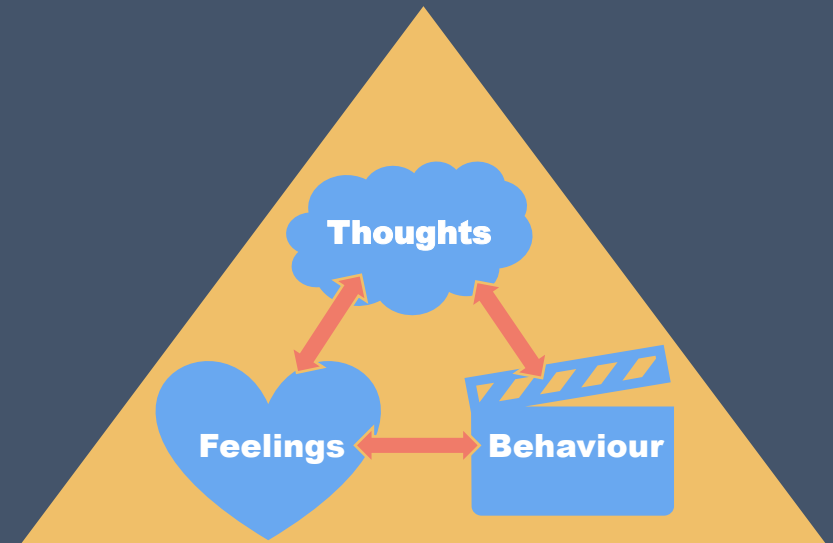
Did you see the rabbit and duck?

Could you see them both at the same time?

These illusions demonstrate that perception is an active process.

It also shows that our first impressions of a situation may not be the only way to view things.

This has important implications when we try to understand how biases in our thinking can contribute to problems with our behaviour and emotions – remember our triangle.



The good news is that we can use this knowledge to help us feel better!

The next few slides show the types of information processing biases (or “thinking errors”) identified by researchers and clinicians in the field of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). There are wide variations in how they are identified and labelled by various workers, but the basic principles remain the same.

[I used as my starting point those identified by David Burns]



Categories of Information Bias

Missing data

Here important bits of information are missing or unknowable.



Attentional

Here your attention is drawn to specific details of the situation rather than seeing it as a whole.



Unruly rules

These rules may have been learnt in childhood but now prove to be unhelpful or unrealistic in your daily life.





Missing Data - I



Fortune Telling

This involves making predictions about the future as though the predictions are always true.

“It will all go wrong”

“The party will be boring”

“I am bound to fail”



Missing Data - II



Mind Reading

This is what I call the “Derren Brown” syndrome . You believe you know what other people are thinking.

“She thinks I’m stupid”

“He wants me to mess up”

“They think I look ridiculous”



Missing Data - III



Jumping to conclusions

You think you understand the reasons for what has happened in the past or is happening now. But you may not have all the facts to hand – you make assumptions based on previous experience.

“He crossed the road to avoid me”

“They want to make my life a misery”

“She did that just to upset me ”



Attentional Bias - I



Focusing on the negatives

You zoom in on the things that are not perfect or that did not go right, thereby losing sight of the things that were good.

“I made the soup too salty”

“The wallpaper in the top corner does not line up properly”

“No one laughed at my joke in the speech”



Attentional Bias - II



Ignoring the positives

Here there is a tendency not to notice anything positive.

If something positive is noted, then it is discounted or turned into a negative. [Known as “reverse alchemy”]

“He was only being nice because he wants something from me”.

“It was no big deal – any fool could have done it”.



Unruly Rules - I



Taking it personally – I

However lovely and amazing you may be, sometimes people will be talking about others, laughing about others, and they may not even notice you at all.

The world continues to rotate on its axis and orbit the sun without a care for you – that bad weather did not occur to spoil your BBQ or picnic.



Unruly Rules - II



Taking it personally - II

The other side of the coin – you cannot be held responsible for things over which you have no control. To feel responsible leads to feelings of guilt that are unwarranted.

Bad restaurant experience – you were not the chef.

Bad film – you were not the director or actor.



Unruly Rules - III



Tablets of stone

We sometimes find ourselves constrained by strict rules that have been instilled in us since childhood. But hey, we are grown ups now! We can leave our cabbage and go straight to the ice-cream!

Try not to get trapped by the **oughts**, **shoulds** and **musts**. [This is not a plea for immorality, just realistic standards!]

“I must not be selfish”

“I ought to be perfect”



Unruly Rules - IV



Imagining the worst

Here there is a tendency to believe that the worst will always happen, and it will be the worst of the worst.

We are talking about *catastrophising*.

“My friends hated the meal, they will never talk to me again, they will turn against me on social media, I will lose my job, my family will leave me, I will be homeless, and die alone.”



Unruly Rules - V



A single swallow does not a summer make

This involves taking a single incident and concluding that it represents the true state of the world.

Beware of words such as **always**, **never**, **everyone** and **nobody**.

“This always happens to me”

“Nobody likes me”

“Everyone else is having fun”



Unruly Rules - VI



Extreme labelling

Here we use strong words to describe people and situations. Often they are out of proportion to what is happening and ignore other features that would help us gain a better and more realistic perspective.

“He is a complete idiot”

“I am a total failure”

“This is a disaster”



Unruly Rules - VII



My mind's made up by the way that I feel

These lyrics from “Love is All Around” (by Reg Presley) neatly capture what is technically known as **emotional reasoning**.

This is the tendency to base our understanding of reality on our emotional responses. Just because you feel anxious and have a sense of dread, it does not mean something dreadful will happen.

“Gut instinct” can be important, but it can also be wrong.



Unruly Rules - VIII



Only two boxes

Here there is a tendency to put people and situations into one of two boxes.

Good or bad

Success or failure

Amazing or Horrendous

Reality is more subtle and complicated.

The next session looks at how you can challenge and change the thinking biases outlined in this session.

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