

UNITED WISDOM

Self-report as data about experience

World and Consciousness

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W-07-N02 · EN

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Epigraph

> *“...introspection is difficult and fallible...” — William James, The Principles of Psychology, VII, printed p. 191; fragment of his own conclusion, from the English original. Observation’s difficulty does not mean experience should be excluded from consideration.*

What this article is about

When someone says they saw a light, heard a melody, or doubted an answer, their report can become data for a particular question. Yet a report is neither the experience itself, a finished explanation of its cause, nor a direct record of every internal process. This article considers self-report as a substantive source with specified conditions: what is asked, when an answer is obtained, and which role it receives. James’s distinction between experience and subsequent description meets research questions about scales and no-report procedures. Descartes’s philosophical argument retains a separate task: first-person grounds do not automatically become a measuring instrument. We choose no universal consciousness scale and test nobody’s condition. The practical aim is more precise reading of experiential assertions, preserving the participant’s voice, research boundaries, and room for open questions when available information supplies insufficient grounds.

I. A report receives its role within a particular question

Imagine someone listening to a short melody and saying, ‘The final note seemed especially clear to me.’ This is an invented scene rather than an auditory study. The report concerns a particular experiential feature. Recording duration would require other information. To understand which note the person singled out, their words become an appropriate source. To explain the clarity’s cause, the sentence supplies no finished answer. One account can enter several questions, but each transition needs grounds. First specify the subject: experience, its present description, or sound’s physical characteristics? These tasks can meet while retaining different requirements. Concerning one melody does not turn them into one assertion or make a single answer adequate for every task.

Self-report here means someone’s statement about their own experience or a specified inner state. This is a working use rather than a complete classification of psychological methods. Forms include narrative, category selection, or a specific question’s answer; in each case, recover what the person was asked to report. Free description and a scale mark are different

documents. One may reveal an unexpected subject, while the other uses supplied options. Their meaning cannot follow from the general word subjective alone; it depends on the question–answer relationship. We establish no form as always superior. We examine conditions without which comparison can confuse different tasks and mistake convenient recording for a complete explanation of experience.

Data gain usefulness from a specified role rather than a promise to reveal everything. The clear-note sentence can be retained as a personal description of that moment. It need not immediately prove a perception theory, certify equipment quality, or characterize the listener’s capacities. A stated boundary does not empty the sentence of meaning. It permits returning to its words, clarifying them, and comparing another ground when an appropriate question arises. Putting every possible inference into the report beforehand hides what the person actually said and what an investigator added. Self-report remains data when content and subsequent interpretation stay distinguishable. Respecting a source includes that distinction rather than making it the only ground for every future answer.

II. James preserves introspection alongside its difficulty

In Chapter VII of The Principles of Psychology, James begins discussing methods with introspective observation. He understands it as looking into one’s own mind and reporting what is found. The selected argument does not end by promising infallibility. He distinguishes immediate experience from subsequent naming, classification, and comparison, which impose further requirements. Someone must have states and also report them. Both points matter together: introspection is an initial method for James, while describing remains difficult despite the observer’s proximity to the subject. This is a historical methodological position, not a completed modern protocol. Adjacent hypotheses about feelings are not all transferred into contemporary empirical assertions simply because they appear in the same chapter.

The passage discusses opposing positions, including infallibility claims and rejection of inner observation. A quotation within the chapter therefore cannot automatically be attributed to James himself. His conclusion that introspection is difficult and fallible follows that debate. It concerns describing and comparing rather than devaluing experience’s existence. A sentence’s provenance helps retain the exact subject when a historical text is used today. Otherwise a convenient fragment could make James endorse the extreme he critically examines. We borrow his own distinction between what is experienced and what is reported. Comparing every participant in the historical controversy would require a separate undertaking and broader source reading than this article claims to have completed.

This context permits reading self-report without demanding impossible completeness. Our hypothetical listener might identify a note without yet explaining what clear means. Clarification need not presume the first sentence mistaken. Ask whether it concerns loudness,

distinctness, or personal significance. These alternatives belong to our invented scene; their distribution among actual listeners was not measured. Retaining an ordinary word preserves the report’s stated breadth, while choosing a clarification creates a narrower subject. The historical argument helps locate a transition from experience to naming without prescribing someone’s only correct formulation. Further checking should address the chosen task rather than a demand to exhaust experience immediately through every available category before a description can count as meaningful.

III. The question specifies the comparable part of a report

‘What did you notice?’ and ‘How confident are you in your answer?’ offer different tasks. Our imagined listener might remember a singled-out note clearly while doubting its supplied name. This is a logically possible combination, not an experimental finding. Comparing reports requires knowing which question faced the respondent. A number without its question loses meaning: it might concern clarity, confidence, or pleasantness. A shared scale from low to high cannot make those subjects identical. Retained data should therefore allow answer conditions to be reconstructed. Otherwise comparison concerns convenient symbols whose connection with experience was silently selected after the report was obtained, rather than a connection established by the actual task.

Question wording also needs intelligible context. Clear can mean a distinguishable sound in one conversation and confidence in understanding a request in another. We propose no universal dictionary of every meaning. We show why definitions belong beside answers. When a study supplies categories, readers should establish their content. If only an abstract is available, a familiar method name should not invite invented instructions. Another publication using the same abbreviation might set different conditions. An instrument’s origin cannot replace acquaintance with a particular procedure. A confirmed general distinction between questions can be retained while instruction details remain outside the text actually read, rather than being supplied through an imagined version attributed to the study.

An ordinary discussion can retain the question alongside its answer: someone described sound clarity after listening; confidence in naming was not yet asked about. This editorial record is no validated psychological scale. Its narrower purpose is avoiding substitution between subjects. If comparison becomes necessary later, missing information will be visible. Every possible cell need not be filled beforehand. An absent answer should not become a low score merely because a table expects a number. Distinguishing an unasked question, refusal to answer, and an actual answer preserves participation’s meaning. It also prevents attributing an inner condition that the report never specified and that no other suitable ground established for the task at hand.

IV. Three scales ask different questions

Sandberg and colleagues' primary 2010 abstract compares three measures in a masked visual identification task. PAS asks about visual experience's clarity; CR concerns confidence in a decision; PDW involves a monetary wager after a decision. These specify different answer subjects. The authors report a stronger performance relationship for PAS in their task, particularly at low stimulus intensities. We did not read complete methods and reconstruct no sample, exact categories, or full analyses. Their conclusion remains this comparison's finding rather than a universal ranking of self-report. For our purpose, the distinction prevents the shared word awareness from erasing the particular question participants were actually expected to answer.

Our invented melody can illustrate the distinction without running an experiment. A listener describes sound clarity and might then discuss confidence in its name. Monetary wagering is excluded from the exercise, and the published procedure is not reproduced. The example illustrates only a changed subject. Low naming confidence cannot automatically mean low experiential clarity unless the connection is justified. The reverse transition likewise requires grounds. Choosing a measure requires explaining which question it serves. A reader can reconstruct that account before combining different answers in one column. Our illustration establishes no population frequency of divergence and offers no way of determining consciousness's organization through two everyday ratings made outside a research procedure.

Calling a measure subjective is insufficient to assess its quality. Consider what it measures in the task, how answers are defined, and what comparison is made. Wording differences may be central, or other conditions may matter more. One abstract need not decide every question. A bounded conclusion is possible: a published comparison has a particular subject and cannot make three procedures interchangeable through a label alone. Readers can seek complete methods if their task requires detailed assessment. A text's online presence does not mean those methods have already been read. This article preserves its actual acquaintance with the source rather than turning available general information into a claim of checking the whole study or independently reproducing its result.

V. Answer timing belongs to the data’s structure

Experience, question, and report occur at their respective moments. James’s Chapter VII explicitly considers subsequent reflection and difficulty naming a state. We use this historical context to ask which moment an answer describes. Our fictional report might be written immediately after the melody or at a conversation’s end. A timing difference does not automatically prove a later narrative false; it identifies a relationship needing clarification. Someone might describe an earlier note, its present recollection, or a new attitude toward listening. If these subjects share one label, readers may assign the first second something formulated much later. Specifying time preserves the account while bounding inference about the initial episode rather than silently rewriting its chronology.

A changed description also requires an appropriate scale. The listener might first say clear, then explain that they meant a distinct ending. In our scene this could clarify the first word. A new assertion not made earlier could also appear. We choose no cause of change for an actual person. Retain the initial formulation, later explanation, and the connection the speaker specifies between them. The first record should not be rewritten as though the later answer always appeared in it verbatim. Preserving history does not prohibit reinterpretation. Different dates show both the original report and subsequent understanding without declaring either the only permissible description of the entire situation across all moments.

A research record can distinguish presentation time, answer time, and later explanation. These markers alone cannot explain internal causes; they disclose available material’s structure. Missing exact times should not be invented from a plausible paragraph order. State what is known: an answer followed a specified task, while the interval is not established by the passage read. This limit particularly helps with brief sources, preventing a description from becoming an imaginary complete procedure. Here time belongs to self-report’s role. It neither replaces content nor automatically judges reliability, but helps formulate the next question about which episode a message can support. The resulting account can remain useful at that explicitly stated scale.

VI. Reporting is an action that can also be studied

Tsuchiya and colleagues' author abstract for their 2015 review asks about distinguishing neural activity related to experience from activity enabling its report. They consider advantages and disadvantages of report and no-report procedures. This is their methodological position; we claim no full-review reading or verification of every discussed experiment. The distinguishability of tasks matters here. Someone can experience and answer, while an investigator should not assume every measure during an answer concerns experience exclusively. The procedure's role needs explanation. The abstract supplies no universal separation technique for us. It supports a narrower question: what belongs to the investigated content, and what might belong to communicating that content in the particular study?

Our hypothetical listener might be asked to speak a word, select a category, or press a button. These are different actions stipulated in the example. We report no measured brain effects or established duration for each. Their difference shows that data include an answer's subject and the means of obtaining it. Choosing between supplied words involves selection; free description takes another form. Comparison should preserve this distinction rather than call every record an immediate imprint of one internal content. Self-report remains important, but reporting does not disappear from consideration merely because it communicates something else. Its procedural role must be visible alongside the experiential question the researcher wants to examine.

No-report should likewise not promise observation of experience without assumptions. Another measure needs grounds connecting it with the state of interest. Here this is a methodological question rather than an account of a particular unread apparatus. We declare no unconditional superiority of one procedural family. Limits can change with the task, and each connection should be disclosed in its appropriate source. Otherwise indirect becomes permission to treat a measure as sufficient by itself, while direct becomes permission to forget reporting's form. Ask about grounds for both transitions. Missing an explicit answer need not mean missing experience; obtaining an answer need not disclose every feature of its origin or settle all questions about how it was produced.

VII. Performance and experience have different definitions

‘Was the object named correctly?’ differs from ‘How was it experienced?’ Our melody scene specified no checkable correct answer, so assigning a success percentage would be unwarranted. A task with an agreed answer would create a separate record of correspondence. It would not become experience’s verbatim content. This is a logical distinction rather than a scientific law of independence. A study can examine two measures’ relationship after defining each. Its comparison then gains a clear subject. Otherwise a correct selection silently becomes complete experience, and personal description becomes a knowledge test about an external object. Neither transition is justified by similar labels or a convenient table alone; each needs its own grounds.

Sandberg and colleagues’ abstract does compare subjective measures with identification performance. We preserve that research question without making any reported correlation a definition of experience. The relationship concerns two specified measures within a procedure. Interpretation may require information outside our brief text selection. One abstract therefore selects no consciousness theory here. A particular comparison can be substantive while a broader question remains open. That preserves data’s scale rather than cancelling them. Evaluating the analysis would require actually reading methods and discussion next. The existing link does not make that step completed or justify declaring independent verification finished before the necessary material has been examined. A bounded reading can identify this further task clearly.

A scientific paper’s reader can identify both labels before assessing their connection. What counted as task performance? What did participants report about experience? When description is partial, retain both questions instead of inventing answers. Missing parameters need not receive standard guesses about a familiar experiment. Our everyday illustration yields an even narrower result: note clarity and naming confidence were not confused. This does not prove they are never related. It shows that our assertion has not exceeded what the example supplies. Distinguishing data supports further research precisely by leaving visible the transition that needs measurement, argument, or a more detailed primary text before the next conclusion can be justified.

VIII. First-person argument and procedural answer

In Meditation II, Descartes turns to his own thinking within adopted doubt. Molyneux's translation unfolds thought through doubting, understanding, affirming, denying, and other activities. These are philosophical grounds for an assertion about oneself, not a ready questionnaire for experimental participants. Reading Descartes beside scale research benefits from preserving their different tasks. One text asks what can be asserted within an argument; the other sets a procedure for obtaining and comparing answers. Their first-person connection cannot make justification identical. We infer no accuracy of every narrative from the Meditation and use no research scale automatically to refute a philosophical argument that proposes no such scale in the passage at issue.

Someone can be sure they are thinking without knowing every component's exact sequence. Here this is a bounded conceptual distinction, not an experimental test of Cartesian philosophy. The existence of a thinking activity and completeness of its description need different answers. Losing the subject makes first-person reporting either infallible evidence for every cause or entirely useless because some details may be inaccurate. Neither extreme follows from the passages considered. Acknowledge personal reporting's role while separately discussing its subject and the further inference sought. That boundary supports using a philosophical text as an argument at a specified scale rather than converting it into an unsupported contemporary measuring technology with capabilities the source never establishes.

Both Descartes and James require a distinction between their words and a present reader's application. The Meditation retains its procedure of doubt; James's chapter retains a historical psychological description task. We compare them through the transition from experiencing to asserting. This is an editorial connection, not identical systems or established historical influence. It requires no immediate adoption of either worldview. A reader can identify a substantive move, its conditions, and their own next question. Discussing soul, body, or consciousness's final nature would need another developed ground. Self-report need not solve those questions to remain useful material for this narrower subject concerning someone's message about experience and the role assigned to that message.

IX. Preserving data includes preserving participation’s boundary

In voluntary conversation, someone chooses which experiential feature to disclose. Our example concerns a neutral melody and requires no difficult-event narrative, assessment of someone else, or private-history disclosure. This is an editorial condition for the exercise, not a law governing every professional procedure. It separates interest in data from demanding an answer at any cost. Declining a category should not be recorded as low experiential clarity. An unclear question can be clarified. These outcomes concern participation and reporting’s structure. They cannot automatically become indications of an inner state that was never specified and that no other appropriate method established within the selected task. Recording the boundary preserves what the available answer actually means.

Recording precisely can also preserve someone’s own words. Our clear note can initially remain without replacement by another person’s category. If clarification is needed, identify its source: the listener or the subsequent record’s author. This provenance is our proposal for reading data, not a tested method for improving memory or well-being. It helps separate the initial message from research description. A convenient shorter label can be added while retaining its connection to the first sentence and transformation’s limit. Readers then see interpretation at work. Every clarification need not become violence against experience, nor every original word a perfect final category. Make the transition intelligible within the task for which the report is retained.

Comparing people also needs grounds. Identical marks may have a common meaning under suitable definitions, but that must be shown. Our hypothetical conversation established no identical understanding of every category among all listeners. A visibly identical number cannot supply it automatically. Seek an appropriate procedure and actual verification of conditions when a task requires such comparison. A personal task can instead retain a clear description without placing people on a shared ladder. Both aims are possible within their scope. This article establishes no worth through word count, answer speed, or a rating. Experiential data become more precise when content, participation, and comparison have specified roles, instead of every number immediately assessing the whole person.

X. A substantive boundary makes self-report workable

Several definite questions remain: what was reported, in answer to what, at which moment, and through which proposed transition toward a conclusion? They are no exclusive canon for all consciousness science. They help read selected material without supplying absent completeness. James distinguishes experience from descriptive work; scale research specifies different questions; the no-report review considers reporting's action; Descartes retains a first-person philosophical task. Each source performs its own work. Joining them creates neither one new measuring theory nor the resolution of a contemporary dispute. It shows where a source supports a sentence and where our own editorial reasoning begins, allowing the next question to be identified without disguising it as an already established result.

Self-report can matter without exclusive authority over every ground. It can meet a task record, performance measure, or other specified information while preserving each subject. If information diverges, first ask whether it answers the same question. Sometimes a genuine contradiction emerges; sometimes the contents differ. This article promises neither outcome and proposes no elimination of the participant's voice for a convenient shared scheme. Nor must every causal interpretation be accepted merely because reporting is personal. An account can be respected while its inference is examined separately. That form of work keeps further research possible without turning a bounded result into a personal verdict or a final explanation of the nature of someone's experience.

A sufficient reading outcome may remain partial: the answer's subject is understood while full methods are unread; a personal description is retained while its cause is unsettled; two measures are distinguished without a universal relationship established. Name each outcome accordingly. Gaps need no plausible phrase to make an article look finished. An essential question sets the next research task; an unnecessary one can remain open. Self-report becomes workable data through a precise connection with question and conditions, rather than absolute transparency. Experience retains a human voice, reporting receives a specified role, and inference its own demand for grounds. This distinction allows continued understanding without forcing one answer to settle every consciousness question immediately.

What this means in practice

If you wish, choose neutral listening to a familiar melody or reading a short note. Record a sentence about one feature without assessing another person. Beside it, specify your question and recording moment. Ordinary words can remain; there is no need to create a number or category when your task requires neither.

Separately state the inference you are willing to make. Check whether experiential clarity became naming confidence, or a present description became an exact record of every earlier second. Leave an unsupported transition as a question. This voluntarily distinguishes content without reproducing scales, monetary wagers, or an experimental procedure.

Finish with a bounded statement: I reported this feature; its cause and other details remain unsettled. The exercise diagnoses neither consciousness, memory, nor health, and is no established therapy. Its possible result is a clearer reporting subject. You can stop, leave parts blank, or return to ordinary description without making a formulation assess someone’s capacities or worth.

Key quotation

> *“…looking into our own minds and reporting what we there discover.” — William James, The Principles of Psychology, VII, printed p. 185; definition fragment from the English original. Read alongside his subsequent conclusion concerning observation’s difficulty and fallibility.*

Connections between traditions

Comparison	Substantive connection and boundary
James VII and Descartes II	Experiencing and asserting differ according to their task. Philosophical doubt supplies no ready procedure for measuring reports.
James VII and Sandberg 2010	Naming experience and specifying a question require care. A historical chapter does not confirm a modern scale comparison's findings.
James VII and Tsuchiya 2015	Reporting differs from the experience reported. A historical distinction establishes no particular neural mechanism.
Descartes II and Sandberg 2010	First-person grounds and procedural measures have different requirements. Scales do not settle Cartesian ontology.
Descartes II and Tsuchiya 2015	A thinker argument and study of reporting's role ask different questions. Missing an explicit answer does not automatically refute experience.
Sandberg 2010 and Tsuchiya 2015	Question choice and answer-obtaining procedure matter for interpretation. Two abstracts establish no universally best instrument.

Primary sources

1. William James, The Principles of Psychology, VII, 1890, original English, York University transcription edited by Christopher D. Green. Selected opening methodological positions and introspection discussion through the author's conclusion read, printed pp. 183–192; not the entire chapter. Quotations belong to James, rather than opponents quoted within the chapter.

2. Kristian Sandberg, Bert Timmermans, Morten Overgaard, Axel Cleeremans, Measuring consciousness: is one measure better than the other?, Consciousness and Cognition 19(4):1069–1078, 2010, DOI 10.1016/j.concog.2009.12.013. Primary English abstract read; complete methods and analyses unread. Question distinctions and a bounded author conclusion are used.

3. Naotsugu Tsuchiya, Melanie Wilke, Stefan Frässle, Victor A. F. Lamme, No-report paradigms: Extracting the true neural correlates of consciousness, Trends in Cognitive Sciences 19(12):757–770, 2015, DOI 10.1016/j.tics.2015.10.002. Primary English abstract in

Monash University’s repository read; neither the complete review nor all experiments discussed.

4. René Descartes, Six Metaphysical Meditations, Meditat. II, William Molyneux’s English translation, London, 1680, Project Gutenberg 70091. Selected opening through the thinking thing’s activities read, printed pp. 11–19; neither all meditations nor collation with Latin.

Tags

self-report, experience, reporting, introspection, James, Descartes, Sandberg, Tsuchiya, consciousness, data, question, answer, scale, clarity, confidence, performance, time, description, interpretation, source, first person, methodology, primary sources, comparison, observation, inference limits, uncertainty, participation, voluntary choice, autonomy

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