



Presuppositions of NLP

The fundamental presuppositions of NLP form the basis of operating assumptions from which the attitudes and techniques of NLP are built. They provide both a framework and an operational base for thinking which create the attitude and mindset facilitates the effectiveness of NLP. Below are the presuppositions. I suggest that you act “as if” these are true, and test for yourself how useful they really are.

1. The map is not the territory.

The word is not the thing, we are always operating out of our models of the world, and our perceptions are our reality. This phrase originated from the work of Alfred Korzybski in the field of General Semantics.

2. There is no failure, only feedback

NLP is interested in outcomes. All results and behaviors are achievements, whether they are desired outcomes for a given task/context or not. At times we all attain outcomes or results that we do not want. This presupposition frames all outcomes as feedback; if it is our desired result, then we know we have achieved our outcome. If the results are other than intended, we use this as feedback to adjust our behavior, and learn.

3. The ability to change the process by which we experience reality is often more valuable than changing the content of our experience of reality.

The how of our experience is often more useful than the what. This includes the identifying the structure of experience, hence one definition of NLP: “The study of the structure of subjective experience.”



- 4. The mind and body are the same cybernetic system.**
Our thinking affects and is affected by our body. Neural patterns, chemical-electrical reactions in our bodies affect how we feel and how we think. Subsequently, our thinking affects our body on a cellular level. In essence, our body and mind are one.

- 5. We experience the world through our 5 senses; it is the “how” we structure of reality.**
All the distinctions humans are able to make in and of our environment and our behavior can be represented through the visual, auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and gustatory senses.

- 6. Anyone can do anything! If one human being can learn a skill or ability, it is possible for another human being to learn that skill or ability.**
We are all hard wired with the same 5 senses. If one human being learned a skill or ability, another can. This presupposition is the basis for modeling and personal change.

- 7. Each person has within himself/herself all the resources needed to resolve any difficulty.**
People have all the resources they need; NLP facilitate access to these resources through various reprogramming and change techniques.

- 8. All behavior is communication (i.e. an organism cannot not communicate or respond).**
One cannot not communicate; this communication axiom posits that even by saying nothing, there is a message sent. Thus, since we are always communicating, as professional communicators, it is our response-ability to be intentional in our communication.



9. The meaning of any communication is the response that it elicits.

It is the response-ability of the communicator to insure the message is received by the intended person or audience. Meaning is subjective; it is up to the communicator to create the experience and meaning that is intended.

10. Any behavior/experience is useful in some context.

All behavior is, or was, adaptive, given the context in which it was learned. All behavior was useful for the person in the context that it was learned. In our world, sometimes continue to use historical behaviors, whether from our families of origin or other places that are not working in our lives in situations where they are no longer useful. NLP assumes that the behavior was useful and is likely useful in other areas as well avoiding judgment of the what is “right/wrong/good/bad”...

11. Positive Intent: People always make the best choices they can make from among available options.

There is a positive intention motivating every behavior; and a context in which every behavior has value. People make choices based on the information they have and what they have learned in their life. NLP presupposes that people will make the best choice available to them at a given time, given the information they have. NLP also presupposes that there may be other options available that the person is either not aware of or has not considered yet.

12. The highest quality information from another person is behavioral information.

Observable behavior, from language used, to skin color changes, to breathing to eye movements is a transformation of internal neuro-processes and therefore carries information about those processes.



13. It is better to have choices than no choices.

The law of requisite variety posits that the element in the system with the most flexibility will be the controlling element. As soon as there are behaviors that you cannot generate, there are then outcomes and responses you cannot elicit.

14. The worth of the individual is held constant, while the behavior can change.

We are all born into the world with much the same physiology. We learn how to live through our family, community, school and of course through the micro and macro culture that we find ourselves in at a particular time in history. Each person's worth is valued, as is their model of the world. NLP deals with what is useful based on the outcomes desired.

There are many sources and variations of "the" NLP presuppositions. I have listed the above 14 as a guide. They may not be "truths" per se, however.... Living and acting as if they are truths, allows and facilitates an infinite number of possibilities and a way of life unmatched by any other. Try them on, see how they feel, and then see what you tell yourself about how good life can really be!