



Figure 3.1 The Flow of Information as Generally Conceptualized in Information-Processing Theory

which flares briefly and then goes out. In the split second after the flash has gone out, you retain a visual after-image of the room, which stays with you just long enough for you to determine where the door or light switch is located. There is a separate sensory memory corresponding with each of the senses, but all are assumed to operate in essentially the same way.

Working memory, also called short-term memory or short-term store (Atkinson & Shiffrin, 1968, 1971), is the stage at which further processing is carried out to make information ready for long-term storage or a response. Originally a unitary construct, working memory is generally thought to have independent processors for individual sensory modes (Baddeley, 1992). Working memory has been likened to consciousness. When you are actively thinking about ideas and are therefore conscious of them, they are in working memory.

Working memory not only holds information for a limited amount of time but also holds a limited amount of information. In other words, you can think about only a few ideas at one time or read and understand relatively few words at once. With very long and complex sentences, for example, the speaker has typically forgotten the beginning of the sentence by the time the speaker is reached. You can well imagine the effect on comprehension and recall that this limited capacity for keeping things in mind will have.

The **long-term memory** represents a permanent storehouse of information. Anything that is to be remembered for a long time must be transferred from short-term to long-term memory. Although forgetting is a phenomenon we all experienced (and will be discussed in detail later in the chapter), it is assumed that once information has been processed into long-term memory, it is never truly lost. As for capacity, despite the protests of many children, long-term memory cannot be filled up. As far as we know, long-term memory is capable of retaining an unlimited amount and variety of information.