

'Abduction' (pub. 30.12.12-17:01). Quote in M. Bergman & S. Paavola (Eds.), *The Commens Dictionary: Peirce's Terms in His Own Words. New Edition*. Retrieved from <http://www.commens.org/dictionary/entry/quote-proper-treatment-hypotheses-preliminary-chapter-toward-examination-humes>.

---

**Term:** Abduction

**Quote:** Any novice in logic may well be surprised at my calling a guess an inference. It is equally easy to define inference so as to exclude or include abduction. But all the objects of logical study have to be classified; and it is found that there is no other good class in which to put abduction but that of inferences. Many logicians, however, leave it unclassified, a sort of logical supernumerary, as if its importance were too small to entitle it to any regular place. They evidently forget that neither deduction nor induction can ever add the smallest item to the data of perception; and, as we have already noticed, mere percepts do not constitute any knowledge applicable to any practical or theoretical use. All that makes knowledge applicable comes to us *viâ* abduction. Looking out of my window this lovely spring morning I see an azalea in full bloom. No, no! I do not see that; though that is the only way I can describe what I see. *That* is a proposition, a sentence, a fact; but what I perceive is not proposition, sentence, fact, but only an image, which I make intelligible in part by means of a statement of fact. This statement is abstract; but what I see is concrete. I perform an abduction when I so much as express in a sentence anything I see. The truth is that the whole fabric of our knowledge is one matted felt of pure hypothesis confirmed and refined by induction. Not the smallest advance can be made in knowledge beyond the stage of vacant staring, without making an abduction at every step.

When a chicken first emerges from the shell, it does not try fifty random ways of appeasing its hunger, but within five minutes is picking up food, choosing as it picks, and picking what it aims to pick. That is not reasoning, because (it is not done deliberately; but in every respect but that), it is just like abductive inference.

**Source:** Peirce, C. S. (1901). *The Proper Treatment of Hypotheses: a Preliminary Chapter, toward an Examination of Hume's Argument against Miracles, in its Logic and in its History*. MS [R] 692.

**References:** HP 2:899-900

**Date of** 1901

**Quote:**

**URL:** <http://www.commens.org/dictionary/entry/quote-proper-treatment-hypotheses-preliminary-chapter-toward-examination-humes>

