

# Cognitive Drift: Loss of Stop Conditions in Symbolic Systems

Cognitive Drift Series – CD 2.2

*A. Jacobs — Reality Drift Framework (2023–2026)*

## Core Claim

Cognitive Drift occurs when symbolic systems continue operating without enforced constraint, allowing thinking to persist without resolution.

## Mechanism

- Constraint weakens
- Invalidation disappears
- Feedback becomes explanatory
- Systems continue without correction

## Key Concepts

- **Cognitive Drift:** Ongoing symbolic processing without grounding
- **Stop Conditions:** Mechanisms that force closure
- **Feedback Inversion:** Wrongness extends the process

## How Drift Emerges

Drift emerges when constraint mechanisms weaken and stop conditions are no longer enforced, producing a collapse of constraint. In stable systems, invalidation leads to closure, terminating the process and binding representations to consequence.

When these constraints break down, however, representations are no longer invalidated but instead reinterpreted and extended. Explanation replaces correction, allowing symbolic processing to continue without resolution.

As a result, thinking remains active and coherent while progressively losing grounding, producing a state of ongoing continuation rather than closure.

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## Observable Effects

- Endless refinement without completion
- Fluency without orientation
- Persistent cognitive load

## Reality Drift Framework Connection

Cognitive Drift can be understood as a local expression of broader systemic drift, where the same underlying dynamic appears within individual cognition.

Just as large-scale systems remain functional while losing alignment with reality, cognitive systems continue to generate coherent thoughts even as constraint weakens and grounding is lost.

In both cases, processes persist not because they are correct, but because nothing forces them to stop.

This reflects a shared structural condition in which systems continue operating without effective invalidation, allowing drift to accumulate while coherence is preserved.

**Keywords:** *cognitive drift, stop conditions, constraint, feedback inversion, symbolic systems*

**Source:** *Integrated into the Reality Drift Framework, this work draws from the Cognitive Drift Archive (2024–2025).*