

Reality Drift Glossary — Conceptual Study Guide

Based on *Appendix B* of *The Age of Drift: Why Modern Life Feels Fake — and What Reality Drift Reveals About the Modern Mind* by A. Jacobs.

How to Use This Guide

This study guide is not meant to be memorized line-by-line. Instead, it helps you:

- Understand how the terms relate to each other
- See how Drift operates across mind, culture, institutions, and technology
- Recognize recurring failure patterns rather than isolated definitions

Think of the glossary as a system, not a dictionary.

1. The Core Engine: How Drift Happens

At the center of the framework are four interacting forces:

Concept	What it Does
Entropy	Environmental noise, speed, fragmentation
Compression	The mind’s ability to integrate complexity
Fidelity	How much meaning survives compression
Reality Drift	What emerges when entropy outruns compression

Key relationship

When entropy increases faster than compression capacity, Fidelity thins. Drift is not a mood or belief — it is a structural condition.

Study prompt

Can you think of an environment where information increased but understanding decreased?

2. Drift Is Not One Thing — It Has Modes

Drift shows up differently depending on where the erosion occurs.

Internal Drift (inside the mind)

- Cognitive Drift
- Identity Drift

- Temporal Drift
- Authenticity Drift

These often feel like:

- Loss of continuity
- Shifting sense of self
- Distorted time perception
- Emotional flattening

External Drift (outside the individual)

- Institutional Drift
- Incentive Drift
- Memetic Drift

These feel like:

- Systems that still function but feel hollow
- Metrics replacing judgment
- Ideas spreading but losing substance

The same underlying mechanism expresses itself differently depending on scale.

3. The Look and Feel of Over-Optimization

Many terms describe how Drift feels rather than how it is measured.

Instead of chaos, modern Drift often produces smoothness:

- Synthetic Realness – Real-ish experiences without depth
- Smoothness Effect – Frictionless clarity that lacks weight
- Texture Loss – Reduced emotional and sensory grain
- Resonance Decay – Feelings don't land anymore

This is why modern environments can feel pleasant but uncanny at the same time.

Study prompt

Why might smoother systems feel less human over time?

4. Inside the Mind: Where Drift First Appears

The framework places special emphasis on pre-conscious processing.

Important layers:

- Unconscious Compression
- Unconscious Compression Layer (UCL)
- Cognitive Architecture
- Cognitive Porousness

Drift often appears before you can explain it. Language comes later. This is why naming Drift can feel relieving. It restores structure after coherence has already thinned.

5. Failure Modes (Where Things Break)

Drift doesn't cause immediate collapse. It produces long-running failure states:

- Filter Fatigue – Exhaustion from constant micro-sorting
- Optimization Trap – Efficiency rising as meaning falls
- Fidelity Decay – Gradual loss of nuance over time
- Ambient Loneliness – Isolation inside high connectivity

These are not bugs. They are predictable outcomes of high-entropy systems operating without sufficient constraint.

6. AI and Synthetic Cognition

AI is treated not as a separate domain, but as an amplifier.

Key ideas:

- Co-Cognition – Shared thinking loops between humans and AI
- Synthetic Flow – Machine-extended focus and clarity
- Synthetic Intimacy – Simulated closeness without reciprocity
- The Mirror Effect – AI reflects patterns back so cleanly it reshapes thought

These concepts explain why AI can feel simultaneously helpful and destabilizing. It increases compression speed without restoring meaning on its own.

7. Putting It Together (Big Picture)

Reality Drift is not:

- A belief system
- A diagnosis
- A single cause

It is a systems-level pattern describing what happens when:

- Environments accelerate

- Compression saturates
- Meaning loses anchoring
- Smoothness replaces texture

The glossary exists to keep the language stable as these ideas spread and are reused across contexts.

Suggested Study Uses

- Build a personal concept map linking terms across sections
- Use terms to name experiences you previously couldn't describe
- Compare Drift modes across work, media, relationships, and technology
- Pair this guide with chapter readings for applied examples

Source Note

This study guide is derived from the canonical glossary in *The Age of Drift: Why Modern Life Feels Fake — and What Reality Drift Reveals About the Modern Mind* (ISBN: 979-8276826493) by A. Jacobs. Additional essays and reference materials related to this framework are available through publicly shared [Medium](#) essays and hosted documents on [figshare](#) maintained by the author.