NANOTIPS TO

BECOME A **BETTER**

CRITICAL THINKER

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SUMMARY HANDOUT

Enhancing your *Critical Thinking*

Critical thinking is an essential skill in the modern day workplace. It promotes objective and efficient problem-solving, helping you connect ideas, spot errors and inconsistencies, and make the most informed decisions.

In this course, you'll learn 10 foundational critical thinking tips designed to help you increase your curiosity, boost your creativity, improve your problem solving and elevate your communication. Critical thinking is a skill for life!

1.
QUALITY
Questioning

1. Scruitinizing like an Investigator
2. Questioning to Stretch your Critical Thinking
3. Practicing Perspective Agility

1.1. **Scruitinizing like an Investigator**

We live in a world oversaturated with information, often from sources with murky agendas. It's never been more important to protect yourself from being influenced by poorly researched or even deliberately misleading information.

How? Learn to scrutinize like an investigative journalist.

Here are 4 tips to help you scrutinize any information you come across:

CREDIBILITY	Check the source's qualifications, experience and industry credibility. If it's research, is it from a reputable journal, or was it a pay-to-publish?
RELEVANCE	Is it recent enough? Does it help answer your questions and improve your understanding?
ACCURACY	Can it be verified against other reliable sources? Does it make obvious inaccurate or false claims? Is it reasonably unbiased? Is it missing any important evidence?
PURPOSE	Could it have an underlying agenda? Are there possible conflicts of interest? Does it try to influence opinion or illicit an emotional response?

1.2. Questioning to Stretch your Critical Thinking

The key to powerful thinking is starting with powerful questioning.

Here are 3 types of critical questions to help you stand out as an analytical, and astute listener:

1. **Clarification questions:**

   – *What do you mean by X…?*

   – *What I understand is… is that correct?*

   – *Could you an example?*

2. **Reason & Evidence questions:**

   – *What led you to that perspective?*

   – *Why do you think that's true?*

   – *What other information might we need?*

3. **Implications:**

   – *What effect would that have?*

   – *If that happened, what else would happen as a result?*

   – *What's an alternative?*

1.3. Practicing Perspective Agility

Your ability to shift perspectives will distinguish you as a better problem solver, lateral thinker, innovator and empathizer. It's called 'perspective agility'.

Here are 2 prompts to boost your Perspective Agility:

1. ROLE QUESTIONS	2. 'WHAT IF' QUESTIONS
• *How would the CEO deal with this?* • *What would a customer in a rush want?* • *What would the compliance team advise?* *Exploring diverse viewpoints gives you broader insights that you might have never considered.*	*"What if …* • *…the budget was halved?* • *…all of our competitors caught up?* • *…this market became over-saturated?* • *…we tried an app?"* *These 'what if' questions help to broaden your thinking.*

Put these prompts on your desk to practice them everyday and make them a habit.

2. CRITICAL *Clarity*

1. Challenging Assumptions

2. Uncovering Root Causes with This One Question

3. Getting Better Buy-In through Critical Thinking

4. Organizing you Critical Thinking

2.1. **Challenging Assumptions**

If you want to make better, smarter and potentially disruptive decisions, practice challenging old assumptions with these 3 steps:

STEP 1: LIST ASSUMPTIONS

List all your assumptions that could be preventing progress or that need scrutiny.

STEP 2: ASK QUESTIONS

Ask questions that challenge these assumptions. E.g.
- *How might this NOT be true?*
- *How could we address this in a different way?*

STEP 3: SEEK EVIDENCE

Seek evidence that validates your answers. Do some R&D, run a focus group or even develop a survey. Stay open minded to what this exercise may reveal.

How will I challenge assumptions?

2.2. **Uncovering Root Causes with One Question**

Too often we focus on the wrong problem or merely the symptoms of that problem, preventing us from developing solutions that address the underlying cause.

Popularized by Toyota, the 'Five Why' technique is a simple and proven approach to help you uncover the root causes of elusive problems by focussing on the cause-and-effect relationship. Essentially, you ask *"why?"* five times to drill deeper until the core issue is identified.

This technique has been shown to not only be highly effective, but also easily used on a wide range of issues across a broad range of industries.

FIVE WHYS TEMPLATE	
Question	Response
1. WHY?	
2. WHY?	
3. WHY?	
4. WHY?	
5. WHY?	

ROOT CAUSE

2.3. **Getting Better Buy-In through Critical Thinking**

How do you identify and prioritize improvements within your organization, and then get buy-in from senior leadership or important stakeholders?

Try the Morris 5, a methodology developed during a Lean Six Sigma deployment in the US Army, designed to move beyond uncovering the root cause to actually implementing impactful improvements.

By asking *"So what?"* five times, you focus on the maximum impact of potential solutions and you're forced to formulate solid arguments that gain buy-in, especially from senior leaders.

'SO WHAT' TEMPLATE	
Question	Response
1. SO WHAT?	
2. SO WHAT?	
3. SO WHAT?	
4. SO WHAT?	
5. SO WHAT?	

MAXIMUM IMPACT
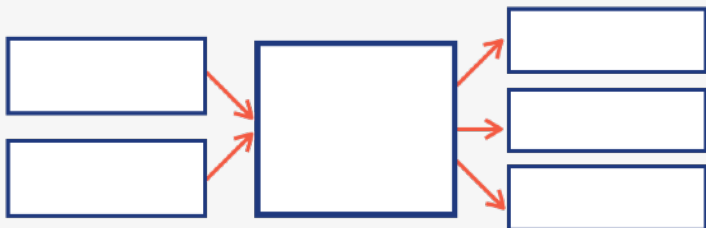
1.4. **Organizing you Critical Thinking**

A highly valuable critical thinking skill is using visual tools to graphically and visually represent your ideas.

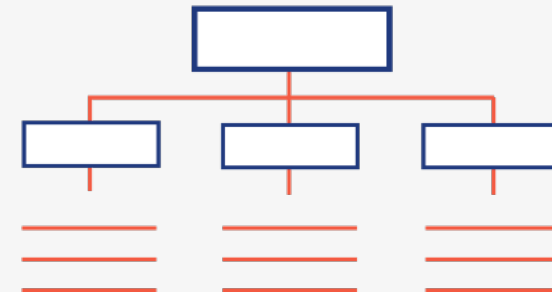**Here are 4 of the simplest virtual models to help you organize and visualize your thinking:**

1. FLOW MODEL
For sequencing
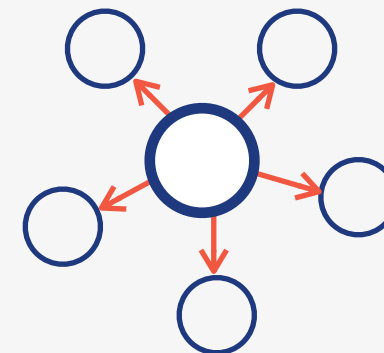
2. CAUSE-EFFECT MODEL
For cause-and-effect

3. TREE MODEL
For classifying

4. MIND MAP
For describing features and links between ideas

3 ADVANCED *Approaches*

1. Encouraging Critical Thinking in Meetings
2. Considering Alternatives using Inversion
3. Overcoming Analysis Paralysis

3.1. Encouraging Critical Thinking in Meetings

Before reaching an agreement, ideas need to be explored and pressure-tested. Yet, in most meetings people are uncomfortable with the clash of ideas because they perceive it as conflict instead of approaching it with curiosity and exploration, which stifles critical thinking.

Here are 2 tips to create a space where people feel safe to speak and respectfully disagree:

✓ **COLLECTIVE PACT.** Make a pact among the group that ideas are owned by no-one. Once an idea is shared it belongs to the group. It can be challenged, scrutinized or embraced without anyone taking it personally.

✓ **ASK QUESTIONS IN A NON-THREATENING WAY.** For example, *"Have we considered the possibility that…"* and *"What if we were to look at things a different way?"*

How will I encourage critical thinking in meetings?

3.2. **Considering Alternatives using Inversion**

The Inversion Method is a critical thinking technique that originally comes from the field of project management (called 'premortem') were you consider potential arguments for why your idea might fail. This process helps you broaden your critical thinking and see other possibilities by working backwards mentally from success to failure.

While it might sound counterintuitive, by considering weaknesses and vulnerabilities in advance, you're better able to prepare for and mitigate them before they arise.

Questions you could ask yourself or the team include:

- *If this idea or project were to fail, what could be the cause of the failure?*
- *What happens if all our plans go wrong?*
- *What would be the worst case scenario?*
- *What are all the possible obstacles that could derail us?*

Then, you do what you can to avoid these becoming a reality. By using inversion you can boost your critical thinking, and improve your chances of success.

3.3. **Overcoming Analysis Paralysis**

A common trap is to fall into analysis paralysis, where your critical thinking becomes 'critical overthinking' and you feel paralyzed from making a decision and taking action. This is often the case when you don't have the required urgency to make a decision.

There is a simple solution to combat this – *Give yourself a deadline!*

This offers the sense of urgency needed for greater attention and focus.

Think critically about whatever you're doing, then use that to make an informed decision. It can also use helpful to keep a record of the decisions that you make and what they're based on so you can remind yourself in future, and this can also be used to justify any course of action (if required).

> How will I avoid critical overthinking & analysis paralysis?