

Core Thinking Skills v2

An effective thinker doesn't become that way by accident. An effective thinker is a person who has a set of base attitudes and skills that enable them to be effective thinkers. An effective thinker is also a fairly balanced thinker. They think critically, creatively and also utilise empathy (caring thinking) as they work through problems and decisions.



Attitudes: An effective thinker realises that some attitudes are detrimental to thinking while other attitudes will support and enhance the thinking process. An effective thinker chooses to allow the positive and supportive attitudes to become part of their disposition as a thinker and learner. There are many attitudes that we may be able to define as enabling thinking and learning, but in terms of classroom and schooling it is useful to identify a small set of core attitudes that we will model, foster and support in the classroom environment.

Work in schools over the last few years has led me to believe that there are 4 key attitudes that have great power in enabling any person as a thinker.

Curiosity: This is the driving force that moves us to seek understanding and to make meaning.

Open Mindedness: This is the willingness to modify one's own world view, beliefs, opinions, understanding, values, attitudes, and behaviours in the light of new knowledge, new experiences and new information.

Persistence: This is the willingness to pursue issues despite obstacles until understanding is gained or solutions are created.

Empathy: This is the willingness to consider the views, beliefs, culture, needs, and situation of others.

These attitudes enable us to cope with life, to be effective as thinkers and learners. Yes there could be other attitudes added to the list but this small set seems to be a powerful combination and I believe that any student who demonstrates these attitudes frequently is well on their way to being an effective thinker and learner.

Thinking skills: There are many lists of skills available, and there is also much debate about what the skills of an effective thinker are. Considering the large and growing list of thinking skills, it seems that amongst this large group of skills there must be some that we would consider as being base or

foundational skills. These are the skills that we would want to ensure that we equip our pupils with. So what are the core thinking skills?

Now obviously there is no one right answer to this question and it is one that could be debated extensively. As I consider the question I have a short list of skills that I currently consider as crucial basic thinking skills. These may well change as my own understanding and knowledge deepens. Watch this space.!

Essential or Basic Thinking Skills:

- The ability to identify a need or problem
- The ability to identify, understand and use relevant contextual vocabulary
- The ability to use relevant questions to guide thinking and gain information
- The ability to extract and validate relevant information
- The ability to create and critique information, argument, belief and theory
- The ability to make informed decisions which consider possible options and their consequences

For each skill there is a suggested matrix of depths to which the skill can be applied.

Step	The ability to identify need or problem
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can identify that a need or problem exists
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can identify a specific and relevant need or problem
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can analyse a situation, recognise a need or problem and its key features
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can analyse a situation, recognising the range of needs and problems, as well as their key features

Step	The ability to identify, understand and use relevant contextual vocabulary
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I attempt to use contextual vocabulary correctly for the context but sometimes I do not have the correct words
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can ask questions to clarify definitions • I can, with support, seek to understand the meaning of words in context
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can independently use a range of strategies to seek understanding of the meaning of words in context. • I use contextual vocabulary appropriately to the context in oral situations
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I use contextual vocabulary appropriately to the context orally & in writing • I attempt to ensure a common understanding of contextual vocabulary • I can demonstrate an understanding that vocabulary can change its meaning according to context

Step	The ability to create and use relevant questions to guide thinking, and gain information. (Refers to QuESTioning Matrix)
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I attempt to ask questions but still create some statements or irrelevant questions • (Typically Types 1 & 2)
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can identify an information need • I can identify and use relevant key words • I can use identified needs and key words to create relevant questions • (Typically Types 3 & 4)
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can identify and use relevant key words and phrases • I can use identified needs and key contextual vocabulary to create a range of relevant questions • (Typically Types 3 - 5)
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can identify an information need and relevant vocabulary • I can edit questions where necessary • I can pose a range of relevant questions including probing questions for interviews.(Stage 3 - 7) • I can take my questions to a variety of appropriate sources • I persist with my questions until I acquire the required information

Step	The ability to extract and validate relevant information
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can extract information from a chosen source
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can extract information from a chosen source relevant to my need
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can extract and validate relevant information using at least two sources
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can find relevant information, validate it by using other sources and by analyse the credibility of the sources

	The ability to create & critique information, argument, belief or theory	
Step	A. The ability to present information/argument with supporting evidence and logic	B. The ability to identify and critique information/argument
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can make an assertion but do not support it with logic or evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify an assertion but not challenge it
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify the difference between fact and opinion in my own assertions I can make a clear statement of fact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify the difference between fact and opinion in other people's assertions
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can create an argument including fact/s or an example to logically support my main assertion. (Uses words like because, therefore, so) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can logically use information to identify motive or contradictions to critique an argument
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can consider and utilise evidence, points of view, information, theories and logic to create a strong argument with justified assertions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can critique arguments, using information and evidence to challenge the assertions and logic, checking for validity, motive, bias contradictions or distortion.

Step	The ability to make informed decisions with due consideration of possible options and their consequences
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I make decisions with no displayed awareness of consequences.
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I make decisions based on obvious immediate consequences or outcomes.
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I consider positives and negatives I consider short and long term consequences I make decisions after considering the above.
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I can identify a range of choices and their possible outcomes. I consider short and long term consequences for other people involved and decide accordingly. I can evaluate and justify the decisions that I have made.

I believe that if we have students leaving our classrooms who frequently demonstrate the attitudes listed above and who have made shifts into operating more frequently in the deeper levels of the skills then we will really have made a difference in terms of empowering our students as effective thinkers and learners.

