



Section 6: Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

Chapter 1: Foundations of Analytical Thinking

Strong analytical thinking starts with self-awareness. This exercise helps you recognize how your thinking habits influence everyday decisions and how small shifts can lead to clearer, more confident choices.

Goal:

Reflect on how you approach decisions and identify where bias, instinct, or assumptions may shape your thinking.

Exercise: Critical Thinking Reflection

Think of a recent decision or problem you had to handle. It could be something at work, at home, or with a team.

What was the situation?

Did you pause to question assumptions, or did you follow your first instinct?

Was there any bias at play (e.g., confirmation bias, availability bias, groupthink)?

Now choose a current or upcoming decision.

What do I know for sure?

What assumptions am I making?

What's one more question I could ask to challenge my thinking?

Use the following **Critical Thinking Checklist** before your next meeting or decision.

These small habits build big clarity over time.

1. Pause Before Acting

Have I taken a moment to slow down before jumping to a conclusion?

2. Clarify the Problem

What exactly is the issue we're trying to solve?

Do I fully understand the context and scope?

3. Question Assumptions

What am I assuming to be true - and how do I know?

Are we relying on experience without checking if it still applies?

4. Consider Other Perspectives

Who else is affected - and how might they see this differently?

Have I asked for input from someone outside my usual circle?

5. Look for Evidence

What facts or data do I have - and what's missing?

Am I prioritizing convenient information over accurate information?

6. Identify Bias

Is confirmation bias, groupthink, or emotional reasoning at play here?

Am I giving more weight to familiar ideas than fresh ones?

7. Explore Alternatives

Have I considered more than one solution?

What's the most creative or unexpected option I've overlooked?

8. Weigh Trade-Offs

What are the risks, benefits, and potential unintended consequences?

What am I willing to compromise - and what's non-negotiable?

9. Think Long-Term

Will this decision still make sense in 6 months?

Does it align with our bigger goals and values?

10. Decide with Intention

What's the next step - and why am I choosing it?

Can I clearly explain the reasoning behind my choice?

Chapter 2: Structured Problem Solving

When challenges feel unclear or overwhelming, structured thinking can help. This exercise helps you unpack a current issue and examine its causes, patterns, or possibilities more deeply.

Goal:

Practice one structured approach to analyzing and solving a messy or stuck problem.

Exercise: Apply a Problem-Solving Framework

Pick one method from the options below and apply it to a current challenge.

Option A: The 5 Whys

Write your surface problem.

Ask "Why?" five times to get to the root cause.

Option B: Root Cause Tree

Step 1: Define the Core Problem

Write your main issue in the center of the page. This is the “trunk” of your tree.

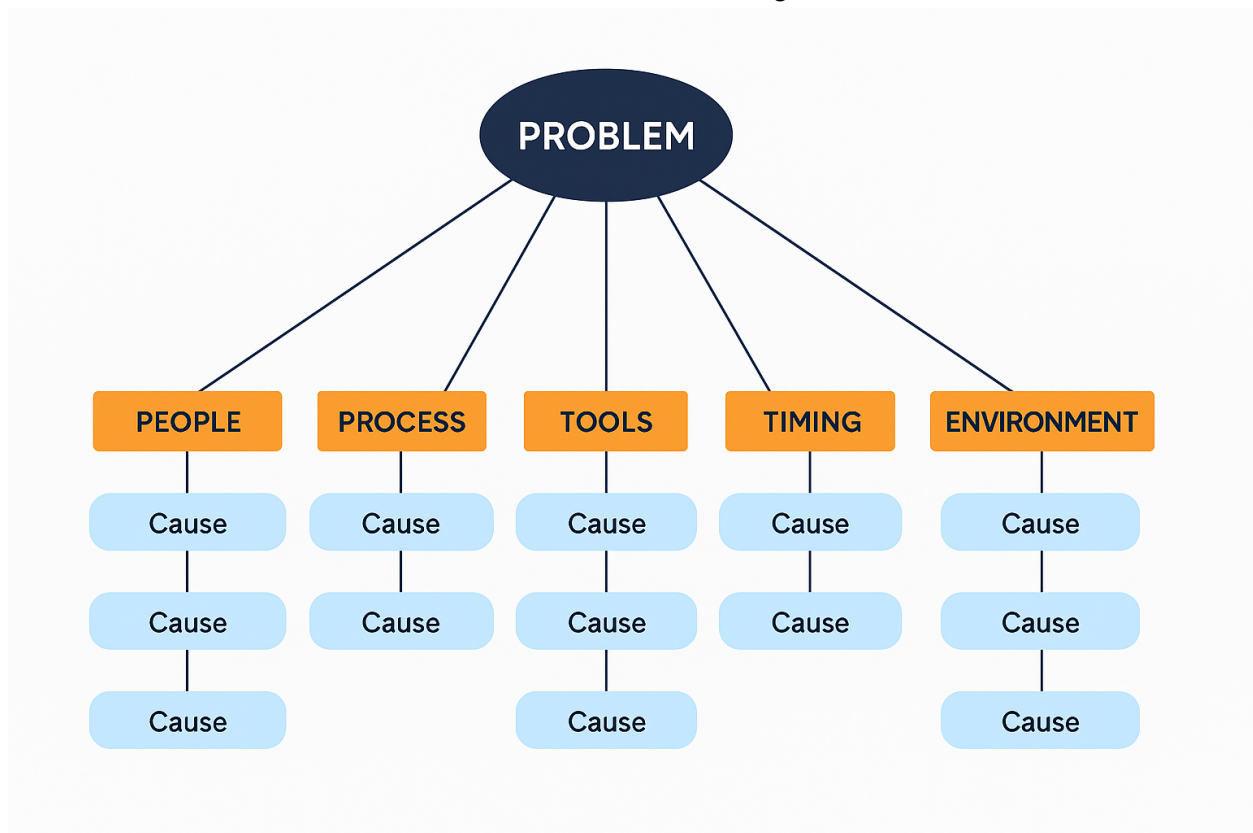
Step 2: Add Main Branches (Categories of Causes)

Draw five branches extending out from the core problem. Label each branch with the following categories: People, Process, Tools, Timing, Environment.

List factors under each branch.

Step 3: Add Sub-branches (Contributing Factors)

Under each category, list specific factors contributing to the problem. These are the “leaves” or sub-branches, such as miscommunication, lack of training, outdated tools, or low morale.



Option C: SCAMPER for Creative Problem Solving

Use the prompts to rethink a task or process:

- Substitute:

- Combine:
- Adapt:
- Modify:
- Put to another use:
- Eliminate:
- Reverse/Rearrange:

Highlight one idea, pattern, or insight from this exercise worth exploring. This is where change begins.

Chapter 3: Creativity in Business Decision-Making

Creativity and logic go hand in hand. This exercise, which combines brainstorming with strategic reframing, will help you think differently about a current challenge.

Goal:

To generate fresh ideas and see your problem from new perspectives.

Exercise: Creative Thinking Practice

Step 1: Brainwriting

Start by giving your brain full permission to explore. Set a timer and jot down every idea related to a current challenge, without judging or editing.

- Pick a challenge or idea you're working on.
- Set a timer for 5 minutes.
- Write down every idea that pops up - no filtering.
- After the timer:
 - Circle 1–2 exciting or unusual ideas.
 - Start one you want to try.

Step 2: Shift Your Perspective

Now, reframe the problem by seeing it through other lenses. Choose 2–3 prompts below to generate new angles or insights.

How would a customer/client see this problem?

What would a competitor do differently?

How would I solve this with half the time or budget?

What's a question a child might ask about this?

Finish with: "One new insight I gained from this exercise is..."

Keep this insight handy and test it in your next brainstorming or decision-making session.

Chapter 4: Decisions in High-Stakes Scenarios

When the pressure is high, your decision-making must be sharp, intentional, and grounded. This two-part exercise helps you reflect on the past and better plan for the future.

Goal:

Build clarity and confidence by learning from past decisions and preparing for future

ones. **Exercise: High-Stakes Decision Reflection**

Part 1: Past Decision Reflection

Think back to a high-stakes decision you've made. Reflecting on it can help you extract key lessons from how you handled it.

What made it high-stakes?

Did you zoom out, assess the bigger picture, or react in the moment?

What were your non-negotiables?

Looking back, what would you repeat or change?

Part 2: Pre-Mortem Planning

Now prepare for what's ahead. Choose a current or upcoming decision and assess how you'll handle it with more intention.

Choose an upcoming decision.

What could go wrong? (List 2–3 risks or weak spots.)

What steps can you take to reduce those risks? What's one

non-negotiable? What are you willing to compromise or stay flexible on?

Finish the page with: "One action I can take this week to move forward with clarity is..."

This anchors your insight in action and keeps your momentum going.