

5 Tips To Spark Critical Thought

It's not always easy to get those critical thoughts going when you need to. If you find yourself struggling to get started, you might like to try one of these five tips to spark that first critical thought. Once you get the ball rolling, it's usually easy to keep going. When you do come across a stumbling block, return to this list and implement another tip until you find that ultimate solution and are ready to move forward.

Ask An Open-Ended Question

The best place to start is to ask yourself a very open-ended question. What it is will depend on your particular situation. If you're running your own company and want to improve profits, you may ask yourself what else you could do to increase your customer base and get more sales. If you're working on decluttering your home or simplifying your life, you could ask yourself what you can live without or no longer need.

Switch the question up if you get stuck. Whatever you do make sure there is more than one answer to the question you're asking yourself. Feel free to grab a notebook and jot down your answers, so you have all that information at your fingertips for later.

Create Hypothetical “What If” Scenarios

Another great mental exercise to get your mind thinking is to come up with “what if” scenarios. They can be open-ended and flexible like “what if it were easy to save money,” or could be more directing like “what if I gave up my daily Starbucks habit.”

Whenever you face a problem, or are feeling stuck, get in the habit of running some “what if” scenarios in your head. It gets you into the routine of considering alternatives and who knows what other ideas this simple exercise will spark.

Meet For A Brainstorming Session

Two brains are better than one. Get together with a group of people to brainstorm a problem and possible solutions. At work, this could be other members of your team who are also affected. At school, it could be a study group. At home, you can get the family together to brainstorm vacation ideas, or you can call a good friend or two.

Brainstorming can be done anytime, anywhere and thanks to the internet and various forms of technology (think Skype or collaborative whiteboard software), you don't even have to be in the same room to brainstorm together. Give it a try. You'll be amazed at how many more ideas and options you come up with when you brainstorm with a group.

Mind-Map It

When you're feeling a bit overwhelmed by all the different options, pieces of information, or directions you could move forward in, create a mind map. You can do this with pen and paper, but digital versions are more versatile and easier to tweak and change as needed.

Try some free mind-mapping software and see how you like it. It takes a little practice to figure out how to get the best results from any software and how to organize your thoughts in a meaningful way. But once you get the hang of it, you'll see just what an amazing thought organizing tool mind-maps can be.

Play Devil's Advocate

Last but not least, I recommend you try playing devil's advocate. Try the simple exercise of focusing on why something won't work. That then forces you to look at your project or your problem and solution from a different angle and in a new light. You'll see something you would have missed otherwise. The change in perspective also helps generate fresh new ideas that may be just what you need to get unstuck.