



Thinking Routines Strategies to Support Learning and Engagement

“Thinking routines” are strategies to help learners engage in and understand the process of thinking. Incorporating thinking routines into your instruction helps to reveal evidence of learners’ insights, promote and develop learners’ critical thinking skills, encourage learners to see thinking (rather than right answers) as the goal, and signals to learners their ideas matter. Thinking routines can be used for a variety of purposes, fitting into three main categories: introducing and exploring; synthesizing and organizing; and digging deeper.

This document includes summaries of various thinking routines found in the book *Making Thinking Visible* (Ritchart, Church & Morrison, 2011). Although the process for these thinking routines varies, they should all conclude with “sharing the thinking.” In this last step, you as the instructor facilitate a discussion—ask learners to report out, discuss themes, identify new thinking and changes in thinking, and debrief the process of engaging in the thinking routine.

Introducing and Exploring

Chalk Talk

Purpose: Learners consider ideas, questions, or problems by silently responding in writing both to a prompt and to the thoughts of others

Process: (1) Write each prompt on large sheet of paper or whiteboard around the room; Decide whether learners will move freely or stay in groups (2) Present the prompts and invite learners to think about their reactions and (silently) record ideas and questions (3) Allow learners to circulate, reading and adding to responses

Compass Points

Purpose: Learners explore issues and propositions from multiple perspectives and identify areas where more information is needed

Process: Direct learners to respond to four prompts: E=excitements. What excites you about this idea or proposition? W=worries. What do you find worrisome or concerning about this idea or proposition? N=needs. What else do you need to know or find out about this idea or proposition? S=stance, steps, or suggestions. What is your current stance or opinion on the idea or proposition? What should your next steps be and what suggestions do you have at this point?

See-Think-Wonder

Purpose: Draw on learners’ close looking and observation as the foundation for greater insights, interpretations, and curiosity

Process: (1) Set up chosen image/object (2) See: Ask learners to state what they noticed. (3) Think: Ask learners what they think is going on in the image/object (4) Wonder: Ask learners what they are now wondering based on the seeing and thinking

Think-Puzzle-Explore

Purpose: Activate learners’ prior knowledge; Encourage wondering, curiosity and planning

Process: (1) Think: Ask learners ‘What do you think you know about ...?’ (2) Puzzle: Ask learners ‘What questions or puzzles do you have?’ (3) Explore: Ask learners ‘How can we explore these puzzles?’

Synthesizing and Organizing Ideas

Connect-Extend-Challenge

Purpose: Help learners make connections, identify new ideas, raise questions, and articulate challenges

Process: (1) Connect: After learners read a passage, view a video, or participate in another information-rich activity, ask ‘How do the ideas and information you’ve just heard connect to ideas you already thought about or knew’ (2) Extend: Ask, ‘How has your thinking been extended in some way?’ (3) Challenge: Ask, ‘What challenges or puzzles have come up in your mind about this topic now that you’ve been presented with these new ideas and information?’

Generate-Sort-Connect-Elaborate: Concept Maps

Purpose: Uncover learners’ mental models in a nonlinear way and help them organize and connect ideas

Process: (1) Generate list of ideas and initial thoughts (2) Sort ideas according to how central or tangential (3) Connect ideas by drawing connecting lines and writing on the line how the ideas are connected (4) Elaborate on any of the ideas or thoughts you have written so far by adding new ideas that expand, extend, or add to initial ideas

I used to think...now I think...

Purpose: Encourage reflection and metacognition; Learners consolidate new learning

Process: Ask learners to respond to the prompt, to help them reflect on how their thinking has shifted over time

Digging Deeper Into Ideas

Red Light, Yellow Light

Purpose: Learners spot and handle potential falsehoods and biases

Process: Ask learners to search a source material for specific moments and signs of possible puzzles of truth. Red lights could be framed as glaring, halting places. Yellow lights are places to proceed with care and caution. Everything else is an implicit green light.

Sentence-Phrase-Word

Purpose: Learners capture the essence of a text by summarizing and distilling

Process: After providing a selected text, ask learners to identify a sentence that is meaningful to them and helped them gain a deeper understanding of the text; a phrase that moved, engaged, provoked, or was in some way meaningful to them; and a word that has captured their attention or struck them as powerful

Step Inside

Purpose: Learners practice taking the perspective of another point of view

Process: Direct learners to think about a person or object connected to an event, situation, or story and consider: What can this person, animal, or thing see? What might they know about, understand, or believe? What might they care about or wish would happen?

What makes you say that?

Purpose: Foster learners’ disposition toward evidential reasoning

Process: Weave the question into discussion to push learners to give evidence for their assertions

Reference

Ritchhart, R., Church, M., & Morrison, K. (2011). Making thinking visible: How to promote engagement, understanding, and independence for all learners. Jossey-Bass.