

Preparation for Individual Exercises

During the Thinking Tactics workshop, there are several individual exercises. In these, you will test out the techniques on a topic of your own choosing. The exercises will be easier if you have some possible topics in mind before class. The best time to think of topics is a day or two beforehand.

1: A Topic for Thinking

For the exercise in unit 1, you need a question of modest difficulty, such as:

- How could I get more free time to do _____?
- What am I going to do about the _____ problem?
- I keep putting off _____. Do I need to do it? And if so, what's the plan to get it done?
- What are my priorities for _____?

Choose a question with no obvious answer. Make sure it is a question you care about answering—it should be worth at least five minutes of your time.

(It is fine to keep this topic private. During discussion, you can describe the process without discussing the actual issue.)

2: A Floundering Task

In unit 3 we will discuss floundering. Floundering means exerting effort, without making reasonable progress toward your goal. Since thinking is your guide to action, floundering is always an opportunity to do some hard thinking about how to guide yourself better.

For the exercise in unit 3, think of a task on which you are making very little progress. It could be a long-term goal or a current project that's bogged down, e.g.:

- A New Year's Resolution that you aren't keeping
- An amorphous project that you're avoiding
- A task that is taking much longer than you think it should

You will have an opportunity to think about how to get this project moving forward.

(Again, it is fine to keep this topic private. During discussion, you can describe the process without discussing actual issue.)

3: A Largish Task on Your Agenda

For the exercises in units 4 and 5, you need to think of a largish task which you plan to do in the upcoming week. It should be small enough that you think you ought to be able to complete it, but large enough that you have some concerns about whether you will in fact complete it. It is fine if it is the first phase of a larger task, e.g., you want to complete a plan for a larger project, or a prototype version of something.

Some reasons you might be concerned about completing it:

- you are worried about clearing a big enough time block to work on it
- you are worried about finishing by the deadline
- you are worried about finishing this week because there is no pressing deadline
- you are worried that there will be so much deadline pressure you will wring yourself out on this project, thereby impacting other work
- you are worried that you'll be perfectionistic about it

Choose a “doing” project with a tangible result—a “deliverable.”

Don't choose a purely cerebral project, such as “figure out why so-and-so is not performing” or “work on overall strategy.” A pure thinking task is too intangible and amorphous for the class exercise. The techniques greatly aid thinking about amorphous, intangible issues, but you will find it easier to learn the techniques by applying them to a more tangible project first.

Here are some tasks people have used this procedure on:

- Prepare a 10-page handout for a class
- Complete a real-estate appraisal for a large property
- Plan how to move several roomfuls of equipment to a new location
- Make an estate plan
- Create slides and script for a presentation
- Create a webpage for a product
- Make inroads clearing large “huh” piles in the office
- Do a complete “mind sweep” of all open commitments (per David Allen's *Getting Things Done*)
- Specify editing changes on a 4-hour audio recording
- Create a brochure

These are just examples. For class, choose your own task, one which has a clear completion point. Make sure it is interesting and timely to think about, so the work in class will be worth your while. You will have an opportunity to discuss your project with others, if you so choose.