

Need to Get *Unstuck?* Or *Evaluate an Idea?* Try **Six Thinking Hats**.



Got a problem and need an answer? Don't just put on your thinking cap. Try Six Thinking Hats instead.

Six Thinking Hats is a useful way to ponder problems and ideas. Why?

Because our brains are wired to use different thinking moods. Tap into all of these and you get better thinking. But our thoughts can easily get stuck or jumbled. Maybe we only focus on the things we don't like about a situation. Or maybe we like an idea so much we ignore things that could go wrong.

Six Thinking Hats helps us listen to each other and problem- solve better by exploring a situation from all thinking moods, one thinking mood at a time. This way, we are more likely to:

- Sort facts from feelings
- Speak up
- Hear other people's opinions
- Make decisions faster
- Try something new

Six Thinking Hats has just a few rules:

- Spend a few minutes on each hat.
- Let everyone add their thoughts.
- Stay focused on one hat at time.
- Don't skip hats.

There are many ways you can do this. You can just talk about what hat you are "*wearing*" as you move through a conversation. Sometimes it helps to write down what everyone is saying so you can look at it later as a reminder. Maybe have fun drawing the hats with colored markers or pencils.

Pay attention to your thinking moods. You can use all six to move from feeling stuck to a better place of new possibilities.



Yellow Hat List the good about the situation, or what you like about the idea.



Red Hat Share your feelings about the problem or new idea.



Purple Hat List things you don't like about the situation, or what worries you about the idea.



Green Hat Share any new ideas that come to mind as you talk it through.



White Hat List facts about the problem, or what information you would need to try the idea.



Blue Hat Review what you have learned and decided as next steps.

*Creativity researcher Edward de Bono developed Six Thinking Hats.
Learn more about this technique and others at his website, debono.com*



Example for Teens—Your parents worry that you're over-extended between school and outside activities. They want you to pull back a bit so you have free time. You like everything on your plate.



(positives)—Your parents love your enthusiasm to be a good student and your involvement in other activities. You're having a great time and just feel excitement about everything you're learning and doing. You've got a million ideas for new projects, too.



(negatives)—Your parents think you're becoming too focused on all work and no play. You only have one chance to be a kid, they say, and many years ahead to be an adult. You think they just don't understand or appreciate your ambition because they don't have the same personality.



(facts)—Sometimes you have to stay up extra late to get homework done because you have so many after-school activities. You clarify that it depends on the homework—special projects or new subjects occasionally surprise you with the effort needed. And you'll admit that being an idea person means you sometimes try to take on too many things at once.



(feelings)—Your parents feel they aren't doing their job as parents if they don't help you learn to balance. They worry about how tired you look. You feel annoyed—would they rather you were getting in trouble instead?



(new ideas)—What if you list all of your projects and activities, then rank them according to "fun" or "useful to the future" to see which emerge as highest priority? Then, pick one thing to give up within the next couple of months. And, what if your parents arrange some fun family recreation for that free time—something you don't normally get to do?



(summary)—Your motivation and excitement about life are inspirational. Having "down" time is important to enjoying life, too. You'll keep most activities but find at least one to give up, using your own judgment about what is most important. Everyone agrees to try this out and then discuss how it's going in a few months.

Example for Adults—Your job feels like a dead end and you're constantly dodging the latest round of layoffs. You're trying to decide whether to make a career switch or go back to school.



(positives)—You absolutely dread going to work right now. Trying something new would bring relief and feel exciting. And it has the potential to reduce your commute. You also love learning and have always wanted to pursue more schooling.



(negatives)—All of the unknowns. Would your finances weather the change? Would it still feel like a good choice over time? What if you're not successful at the new career? You've been out of school a long time and that could prove too costly.



(facts)—Your current job does give you stability, but that stability is at constant risk. You don't see things changing and you've realized the culture is just not for you. There are several resources you can tap to help research the specifics and figure out a transition. You need more savings built up, though, as a buffer.



(feelings)—Scared to take the plunge and yet your gut says it's the right thing to do.



(new ideas)—You need to move this from a vague wish to a concrete transition plan. That includes more aggressive savings for the next several months and narrowing down options through research. And looking at job descriptions for the new career should you me what skills you need to shore up.



(summary)—You're going to stick with your current job in the short-term if you can (a year at the max) while you plan a move. You're going to take advantage of free or low-cost trainings to start building skills for the new career and find ways to start getting advice from other people in the new field.



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Example for Teens—It's time for your high school service club to pick a new project. Everyone has a personal favorite and the discussion is just going on and on. Four ideas have surfaced with the most support. Ask the group to break into four small groups and give one idea to each. A tip: put the ones championing an idea on a team looking at a different idea if you can. Give the groups 10-15 minutes to move through the Six Hats exercise on the idea.



(positives)—What's exciting about this project idea? What do we like about it?



(negatives)—What challenges or problems could we face with this project?



(facts)—What else would we need to know to do a good job with this project?



(feelings)—What's your gut reaction to the idea? Thumbs up, thumbs down, or not your favorite but you'd support it?



(new ideas)—How could we make the project idea even stronger? Or, does this give us new ideas for different projects?



(summary)—Each team spends a couple of minutes reporting their Six Hats content to the whole group. Then, give everyone markers or colored stickers and have them cast their final vote for one project. This gives you a visual vote tally while keeping the group moving around versus debating longer.

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