



**PREPARING THE MIND FOR LOGICAL THINKING
AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Preparing the Mind for Logical Thinking

1. Be Attentive

- Many mistakes in reasoning are explained by the fact that we are not paying sufficient attention to our surroundings. This is especially true with familiar situations. That very familiarity can cause us to misread a situation. When we are familiar with a situation we skim over it rather than spend time perusing it. We often assume that a familiar situation will be a repeat performance of a similar situation we've experienced before. This assumption can cause us to make careless judgments about facts right before our eyes. In the strictest sense, there are no repeat performances. Even a familiar situation can be unique; if we are not attentive, we will miss its uniqueness.

2. Get the Facts Straight

- The best way to establish the veracity of a statement is, if possible, to examine the original data upon which that statement is based. We then have direct evidence. If we cannot establish the truth of a statement with direct evidence, we must rigorously test the authenticity and reliability of whatever indirect evidence exists. Only after careful examination of that evidence can we confidently establish the truthfulness of the statement.

3. Be Mindful of the Origins of Ideas

- We all tend to favor our own ideas, which is natural enough. They are, after all, in a sense our very own babies, the conceptions of our minds. But our minds are, in part, a result of our encounters with the world. Our ideas owe their existence, ultimately, to things outside and independent of us: objective facts. The more we disregard the objective facts that underlie ideas, the more unreliable those ideas become.
- Our ideas are clear, and our understanding of them is clear, only to the extent to which we keep constant tabs on the data to which they refer. Our focus must always be on the original, objective, real-world origins of our ideas.

4. Match Ideas to Facts

- Ideas that stray from the original facts can become unclear or unsound. If this occurs, the idea is now a reflection less of the objective world, but more of the subjective state of the persons who nourished those ideas. Bad ideas do not just happen. We are responsible for them. They result from carelessness on our part. This occurs when we cease to pay sufficient attention to the relationship between ideas or, worse, we have willfully rejected objective facts.

5. Match Words to Ideas

- Putting the right word to an idea is not an automatic process and sometimes it can be quite challenging. We have all had the experience of knowing what we want to say but not being able to come up with the words for it. We often cannot come up with the right word for an idea because we don't have a firm grasp on the idea itself. Usually, when we clarify the idea by checking it against its source in the objective world, the right word will come to us.
- In the effort to come up with words that accurately convey ideas, our ultimate purpose should always be this: to shape our language so that it communicates to others the way things actually are in our objective reality.

Effective Communication

Once you have sound, strong ideas, you must properly communicate them to your audience. This can be tricky if you are not a master of communication. In any event, if we are going to attempt to communicate an idea to others, it is imperative that we express ourselves clearly and effectively. However, it is impossible to have clear communication without clear thinking. How can I give you a clear idea of something if it is not first clear in my own mind? However, clear ideas do not guarantee clear communication. I may have a perfectly good idea of what I am trying to say, but still struggle to clearly and effectively communicate that idea. Here are some keys for effective communication.

- 1. Don't Assume your Audience Understands your Meaning if you Don't Make it Explicit.**
 - It is always better to err on the side of clarifying too much than too little. Do not leave parts of your idea open for others to fill in with assumptions.
- 2. Speak in Complete Sentences.**
 - This is a way to show the audience that you know what you are intending to say. If you fail to use complete sentences, it may imply that you are unsure how to link your ideas together. When you speak in complete sentences it gives the audience no room to insert their own words and make assumptions about your meaning. In addition, it also instills confidence to the listeners that you completely understand your idea.
- 3. Don't Treat Evaluative Statements as if they were Statements of Objective Fact.**
 - Evaluative statements do not lend themselves to a simple true-or-false response. When we attempt to pass off an evaluative statement as if it were a statement of objective fact, we invite unwarranted responses. True statements of objective fact are not open to argument; evaluative statements are. If I want an evaluative statement to be accepted, I must argue for it.
- 4. Avoid Double Negatives**
 - Double negatives cancel each other out, making the sentence affirmative. This can sometimes cause confusion, since the sentence sounds negative but is in fact affirmative. To avoid that confusion, and for greater clarity of expression, avoid double negatives.
- 5. Gear your Language to your Audience**
 - Don't use technical language merely to impress people. The point is to communicate. The two extremes to be avoided are talking down to people and talking over their heads.
 - An important point to note here is that we obviously cannot attune our language to our audience if we do not know our audience. The first order of business, then, is to have a reasonably good sense of the composition and background of the group you will be addressing.
- 6. Avoid Vague and Ambiguous Language**
 - Vagueness and ambiguity are specific instances of the kind of language that can inhibit clear and effective communication. Vague and ambiguous words and expressions wander about among various ideas instead of settling upon a specific concept. They all share the defect of not having a fixed, unmistakable meaning.
 - A word is vague if we do not know precisely what meaning the word is pointing to. As a rule, the broader the word, the vaguer it is. A sure preventative against vagueness is to make your words as precise and sharply focused as possible.

- An ambiguous term is one which has more than a single meaning and whose context does not clearly indicate which meaning is intended.

7. Avoid Evasive Language

- You should always be straight forward enough in your language that it would be impossible for any reasonably attentive audience to miss your meaning. The problem with evasive language is twofold. First, it can deceive an audience. Second, and more subtly, it can have a deleterious effect on the people who use it, distorting their sense of reality. The user shapes language, but language shapes the user as well. If we constantly use language that serves to distort reality, we can eventually come to believe our own twisted rhetoric.

The end goal of all this reasoning, logic, and the effective idea presentation is to arrive at the truth of things. This is often an arduous task, as truth can sometimes be painfully elusive. But not to pursue the truth would be absurd, since it is the only thing that gives meaning to all our endeavors. It would be equally absurd to suppose that truth is impossible to truly attain. That belief renders our activity purposeless, irrational, and turns truth into a chimera. Establishing the truth in any particular situation is a matter of determining whether what one believes to be true, or suspects to be true, actually has a basis in fact.

Summaries taken from the book *Being Logical, A Guide to Good Thinking*
by D. Q. McInerney