

# Academic Thinking Styles

Understanding the Academic Thinking Styles helps you seek out and organize information in a more effective way. Using thinking styles is a tool to help you understand your own style as well as become aware of potential blind-spots in your studying.

Here is an excerpt from an essay in *Future-Proofed* that addresses thinking styles:

The brain is a thinking machine. Just as everyone has a specific style of speaking, the brain has a specific style of thinking. From one point-of-view the brain can be thought of as an information device. It is designed to gather information about the environment to keep you safe from danger and alert to opportunities.

Your thinking style is going to be approaching the knowledge from many different points of view. The problem occurs when students think that they know a topic, but really, they just know one perspective of the topic. They just know the details, the definitions, and not necessarily how everything fits together or connects. For example, students may know how to do a math problem but they may not necessarily know why it works or what it is called.

When you know your thinking style, you will know your strength and you will also know what thinking styles you need to develop. Ideally, you will become comfortable in each of the three thinking styles. You will get in the habit of taking notes with each question answered for each concept, and include each thinking style in your writing.

As such, your brain focuses on 3 specific questions to make sense of the world.

- 1) What?
- 2) Why?
- 3) How?

WHAT  
WHY  
HOW  
THINK!

# How to Determine Your Thinking Style

Your Academic Life Coach will provide a lot of valuable experience to help you determine your thinking style. Sometimes your style is readily apparent. Sometimes it is tough to determine. The key is to recognize the kinds of questions you find yourself asking when trying to learn something. Below are the specific characteristics of each thinking style.

## What Thinkers

What thinkers tend to love detail and want to know the names, definitions, facts, and more about the material itself. What thinkers may put a copious number of facts in an essay, and put hours of work into their writing, but be frustrated with not earning the highest grade because teachers want more analysis. (In other words, the teachers want to know more than just the facts and have a balance of thinking styles in an essay.) What thinkers assume that if they can know all the correct facts, and are knowledgeable about the facts of a situation, the cause (or why) or method (or how) will be apparent.

## Why Thinkers

Why thinkers want to understand the reasons behind the action. Detail is somewhat important, but not as important as knowing the motivation behind someone doing something or the cause of something happening. These kinds of learners tend to drive teachers who are ‘what thinkers’ crazy, especially in a subject like math. Why thinkers assume that if they can know the causes behind something, they know all the important facts and there can be any number of methods to accomplish it.

## How Thinkers

How thinkers want to understand how they can do something or how it happened. To a how thinker, most details are not that important, but the essential details are paramount. When writing how thinkers tend to summarize or retell the event *from their particular point-of-view*. As a result, their papers tend to be light on

synopsis and analysis and make the reader work to fill in many of the details. How thinkers assume that the reasons are obvious, the details are usually superfluous, yet if someone knows how to do something, all the other pieces of knowledge will fall into place.

# How to Use the Concept of Thinking Styles

Each Thinking Style is a channel or method of thought. Each is valid and important. Similar to a learning style, one of the goals of knowing about and using thinking styles is to become proficient at each style as well as know which styles might be your weak point. If you know, for instance, that you are a how-thinker, you may want to take more time focusing on the specific definitions or names when studying. If you are a what-thinker, you may want to spend more time looking for analysis and the reasons behind action. If you are a why-thinker, it would be worthwhile to spend just a little more time on the names and definitions as well as get used to learning specific methods for solving a problem.

The key to using learning styles is to become comfortable with each style, and to make sure that when you are studying you understand the concept from each of the three angles.

- 1) What are the details and definitions?
- 2) Why did it happen this way? Why does it work?
- 3) How did it happen? How can I do it?

## Exercises for Building your Thinking Styles:

- Take notes that you would usually take in class. Then, when reviewing your notes, code them into **What**, **Why**, and **How** for each major concept. If you cannot find a **Why** or **How**, that is a good question to ask the teacher next time in class.
- Practice writing paragraphs that address each of the four questions. Students often find themselves favoring one thinking style, which leads to writing that is either filled with too many details and little analysis, or a summary of what happened without really letting the reader know what the main topic is and the reasons behind it. By addressing each of the four thinking styles, in turn, you ensure that you will begin to write outstanding paragraphs and papers (which will also help you on the college application).
- Pay attention to the kinds of questions each teacher asks and the kinds of information your teacher is giving in class. Is your teacher fond of names, dates, and details? If so, then she is probably a what thinker. Does he like to delve into the possible reasons why something happens? Then he is a why thinker. Does she spend a lot of time going step-by-step through the problem or section? Then she is probably a how thinker.