

THINK SMARTER WITH DE BONO'S SIX THINKING HATS

A practical guide for critical and creative thinking (solo or with a team)

WHAT THIS IS

This short guide helps you use **Edward de Bono's Six Thinking Hats**. A simple, powerful method for improving the *quality* of your thinking and the *breadth* of your perspective.

It builds on *Be More Strategic, Chapter 5: Be (More) Rational, Be a Critical Thinker* and links directly with *Chapter 6: Be (More) Imaginative, Be a Creative*, where we explore structured tools to expand creativity, challenge bias, and unlock fresh insight.

"Strategic thinkers don't just think harder they think differently."

Alongside this guide, you'll find a downloadable set of **Six Thinking Hat Prompt Cards** which are ideal for in-person or virtual exercises.

WHY IT MATTERS

In meetings or problem-solving sessions, everyone tends to "wear" a different mental hat at once. One person focuses on risk, another on facts, another on ideas and the conversation quickly fragments.

The *Six Hats* method separates these thinking modes, allowing you to explore one at a time. This prevents circular debate, reveals blind spots, and accelerates both critical and creative thinking.



It works equally well for:

- Defining or testing a problem (alongside your *Problem Statement* guide)
- Generating ideas (*Chapter 6: Creativity and Divergent Thinking*)
- Making balanced decisions

THE SIX HATS AT A GLANCE

HAT	COLOUR	FOCUS	REFLECTIVE PROMPT
White Hat	Neutral	Facts & information	<i>"What do we know? What data or evidence exists?"</i>
Red Hat	Emotion	Feelings & intuition	<i>"What's my instinct or gut reaction?"</i>
Black Hat	Risk	Caution & critical judgement	<i>"What might go wrong? What could be a weakness?"</i>
Yellow Hat	Optimism	Benefits & value	<i>"What's good about this? What opportunities exist?"</i>
Green Hat	Creativity	New ideas & alternatives	<i>"What else might we try? What's possible?"</i>
Blue Hat	Process	Overview & control	<i>"What's our goal? How do we manage the process?"</i>



OPTION 1: RUNNING THE EXERCISE WITH A TEAM

You can use this in workshops, meetings, or online sessions. The *Blue Hat* (process manager) facilitates the flow.

Before You Start

1. Define the *topic or problem* (use your *Problem Statement* guide).
2. Print or display the **Hat Prompt Cards** (one per hat).
3. Explain each hat's role to participants.

How to Run It

1. **Start with the Blue Hat** – set the objective and order of hats.
2. Everyone wears the same hat at the same time for 3–5 minutes.
3. Capture ideas on a whiteboard, shared doc, or sticky notes.
4. Rotate through each hat (usually: White > Red > Black > Yellow > Green > Blue).
5. End with the Blue Hat to summarise insights, decisions, or next steps.

Tip: Keep each round short and focused, the power lies in rapid shifts of perspective.

Reflection Questions (as a group):

- Which hat was easiest for us? Which was hardest?
- What new insights emerged when we focused on one hat at a time?
- How might we combine our different hats more deliberately next time?



OPTION 2: USING THE HATS ON YOUR OWN

You can use this method individually for decision-making, journaling, or idea generation. It's a great tool for self-coaching and creative thinking.

Step 1: Spot Your Natural Hat

Which hat do you wear most naturally?

- Analytical? (White)
- Emotional? (Red)
- Cautious? (Black)
- Positive? (Yellow)
- Creative? (Green)
- Organised? (Blue)

Start with your **natural hat** — write freely for 2–3 minutes on the topic or decision you're facing.

Step 2: Move to Your Opposite Hat

Next, switch to the hat that feels least natural (your *opposite perspective*).

- If you're optimistic, try the Black Hat.
- If you're cautious, try the Green Hat.
- If you're emotional, try the White Hat.

Be literal: Imagine physically putting on that coloured hat.

Be playful: Write or speak as if that mindset *belongs* to you even if it feels uncomfortable, illogical, or a little ridiculous.

Be curious: Notice what changes when you think this way. Often the “weird” or “uncomfortable” ideas contain hidden insight.

Step 3: Work Through All Six Hats

Spend 1–2 minutes per hat. You can write, voice-note, or just think aloud. The key is to *fully inhabit each perspective* before switching.

“The discipline of thinking differently is the birthplace of creativity.”

When you've completed all six, review your notes:

- What new patterns or insights have emerged?
- Which assumptions were challenged?



- Which options now seem clearer or stronger?

HOW TO USE THE CARDS IN PRACTICE

In-Person

- Print and cut the **Six Hat Prompt Cards** (included).
- Lay them on a table or pin them to a wall.
- Allocate each person a hat and rotate every few minutes.
- Use coloured post-its or hats if you want to make it fun and memorable.

Online / Virtual

- Share a digital board (Miro, Mural, Jamboard).
- Add six coloured sections for each hat.
- Ask participants to add their thoughts to the relevant section before moving to the next.
- Use a timer or facilitator (Blue Hat) to move the group through each stage.

Both formats can be used for:

- **Idea generation** (*Chapter 6: Creativity – divergent thinking and imagination*)
- **Decision-making and risk assessment**
- **Team reflection and debriefs**
- **Strategic problem framing**

WHAT TO DO NEXT

1. Try a solo Six Hats reflection this week on a real challenge or decision.
2. Run a short 20-minute team exercise using the cards.
3. Pair this with your **Problem Statement** and **Assumption Testing** guides for deeper critical thinking.
4. Revisit the **Green Hat** often. It's your creativity muscle; use it regularly to stay open, flexible, and inventive.



REMEMBER:

Critical thinking helps you see the world as it is; creative thinking helps you imagine what it could be.

The Six Thinking Hats give you both structure for analysis and permission for imagination.

