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New York Times Book Review

The Art of Clear Thinking

Rudolf Flesch

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The Art of Clear Thinking Rudolf Flesch
A practical self-help book for all who want to improve their thinking and increase their flow of ideas.

The Art of Clear Thinking Details

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Author : Rudolf Flesch

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From Reader Review The Art of Clear Thinking for online ebook

Raman Shalupau says

Should have titled the book:
99 thinking falacys.

Or better so:
99 actionable business ideas.

Veenishkoul says

Good book with alternative look towards day to day decision.

Russell Robinson says

Older but good book. My favorite theme that he hammers home is that people think with their experience. I have used this many times now in my life when I get stuck on certain things. It is particularly helpful when you are dealing with someone in a situation where you have locked horns so to speak. It isn't always the solution in those kind of cases(for example when its more about someobodies ego than what they really believe) but sometime it can be quite helpful.

Tosh Dawson says

Do you ever get frustrated at television commercials that proclaim their product, "newer, better bigger, voted number one," and other claims that actually mean nothing? Do you get frustrated that most people aren't intelligent enough to realize that open statements are not fact? Is it hard for you to explain to these friends and acquaintances how to increase their awareness of tomfoolery, and to discern it from fact? Then read this book, and give a copy to all the people who seem to think one product is better than another strictly due to the hyperbole it employs. This isn't all that's inside this book, but I want to leave you some treasures to find on your own.

This author also wrote, "the art of plain talk," and "the art of readable writing," which I would love to get copies of, if you can help. Tosh

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Dan Charnas says

This book was written in 1950, and I found it to be relevant today. The author reaches back into history to the time of Aristotle, Plato, Archimedes, and Socrates, and compares their way of argumentative reasoning to methods developed through the ages to the mid twentieth century. It all can be boiled down to playing the

game "20 Questions". Well, ok, not really, but 20 Questions does play a significant part in the book, along with many other techniques that Mr. Flesch describes. I found this to be a fun and interesting book and learned a lot about human nature and the way we think from reading it.

May Ling says

Written in 1951, this little book is quite insightful. It start with an attempt to really articulate what thought is and what isn't. The argument set forth in this book is that thought is pattern recognition plus. The first part of the book discusses the pattern recognition part. The second is a bit of an loose attempt to describe what the plus is.

The idea of pattern recognition is obvious, and yet I think that the author takes it to the next level. He suggests reasons why pattern recognition is advanced by studying different types of languages and exposure to a wider variety of experiences. This is interesting to think about given that the public education system doesn't appear to really engage in this idea at all in its view of learning.

He then discusses different types of logical fallacies and reminds the reader of the types of battles plaguing the simple Aristotalian logic problem of if all a equals b and all b = c, then all a = c. He references Shopenhauers work and the finding of over 40 illogical arguments/appeals that will illicit responses that are false.

The chapter on bright ideas and where they come from is fascinating. I like that the end conclusion is that such ideas can come from anywhere. The broader the experience, the more likely that pattern recognition is possible, the more often you'll have such a so called bright idea. Really gives me a different perspective on how to approach thinking about new things and new experiences.

There is just so much in this book that each chapter could be the source of its own book. I highly recommend it to anyone who thinks such things are interesting.

Jeff Ford says

Great book. Should be required reading in high school.

Nour Kanaa says

" We could improve our personal finances by budgeting, but we don't budget; we could improve our health by dieting, but we don't diet; we could improve our careers by studying, but we don't study. Information is piled high in our lives' archives but we don't use it. Thinking is too hard" but it is too awesome as well.

Gurkirat Singh says

I would rate it much higher than thinking fast and slow. Much more practical to the point no bullshit

approach.

Michael David says

It was on a whim that I shopped on the local eBay website when I saw one of the classic book sellers peddling a book that was more expensive than most of his other items. It was a book written by Rudolf Flesch, and it was entitled, 'How to Write, Speak, and Think More Effectively.' From its title alone one could already surmise that it was a self-help book. Its price, however, was enough to pique my interest in the writer.

I thus looked up Rudolf Flesch and read about his contributions to the use of plain English in everyday life. He is also among the developers of the Flesch-Kincaid readability test (where I usually classify in the 'highly abstract' category), among other achievements.

I decided to read him without further ado, but opted to read other works of his first. When I saw two books of his being sold as a bundle on the international site, I pounced on the opportunity and got this book along with The Art of Plain Talk.

There is a good amount of outdated data, particularly regarding computers, as this book was published in 1951. His suggestions about tackling day-to-day problems, however, remain useful and practicable even until today.

Some of Flesch's quips are also witty. His comments regarding other popular literature at the time were, to me, scintillating. This is his opinion on Dianetics: 'Dianetics, in fact, was only one in a long line of "comfort" books - the literature on how to relax and not to worry about anything. These books are commonly classified as nonfiction books, but that doesn't mean they are factual. People read them regardless of whether they contain information or misinformation; they take them as sedatives.'

His conclusion was also well-made: 'Of course, we all pride ourselves on having an open mind. But what do we mean by that? More often than not, an open mind means that we stick to our own opinions and let other people have theirs. This fills us with a pleasant sense of tolerance and lack of bias - but it isn't enough. What we need is not so much an open mind - readiness to accept new ideas - but an attitude of distrust toward our own ideas.'

Finally, however, he introduced me to Schopenhauer's immortal quote on reading: 'Reading is merely a surrogate for thinking for yourself; it means letting someone else direct your thoughts. Many books, moreover, serve merely to show how many ways there are of being wrong, and how far astray you yourself would go if you followed their guidance. You should read only when your own thoughts dry up, which will of course happen frequently enough even to the best heads; but to banish your own thoughts so as to take up a book is a sin against the holy ghost; it is like deserting untrammeled nature to look at a herbarium or engravings of landscapes.'

This complex quote, in Flesch's own words, was simply written by him as: 'Aimless reading is bad for thinking,' and I believe that allows me to give him a soft 5.

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pearl says

Overall this was a good read and I enjoyed it! Despite some very dated scientific references (e.g. lobotomy, electroconvulsive therapy) and a few slow introductory chapters, the book is elegant, informative, and applicable to every day life. Flesch provides tips to think more critically, especially to safeguard against those who would pull the wool over your eyes, in addition to offering idea-generating and problem-solving techniques that would be useful even in a product design environment. This book really shines as a primer to approach life with a humble, flexible, and ever-curious mind.

Christian Schwoerke says

This book is no less practical now than when it was published in 1951. I was curious about the book because I'd been taught to read (better) with his book Teaching Johnny to Read, which was essentially a primer with long lists of words that were to be read aloud, using phonics to decipher new words. This book was a follow-up to his popular Why Johnny Can't Read, which was a sensation in the mid-50s for its expose of the poor pedagogy that was being practiced in public schools, namely teaching children to sight read, to recognize words as whole entities, rather than as aggregates of syllables and letters.

Flesch spent a lifetime articulating simple and straightforward ways of communicating, and this little book, as he says in his introduction does not break any new ground, but serves instead as a reminder to the reader of those things that work. But he does try to provide some background to what is involved in thinking, with a discussion of cognitive theory and psychology, each kept to basic and commonsensical proportion.

Through his first seven chapters, each rife with anecdotes and references he is able to validate with detailed endnotes at the end of the book, he comes up with a summary list of five points, and then ten chapters later, the list has grown to eight practical points. Clearly, repetition is a good way to ensure that one is thinking clearly about a subject. The list:

1. Try to remember that everybody, including yourself, has only his own experience to think with.
2. Try to detach your ideas from your words.
3. Translate the abstract and general into the concrete and specific.
4. Don't apply general rules blindly to specific problems.
5. To solve a puzzling problem, look for a seemingly irrelevant key factor in the situation and for a seemingly unsuitable pattern in your mind.
6. Narrow the field of solutions by asking "twenty questions."
7. Remember that bright ideas are often wrong and must be tested.
8. Don't underrate the influence of chance.

This particular chapter focuses on how to think through difficulties, and Flesch surveys the field of commentators, each having essentially the same insights about the process. At the end, he offers this down-to-earth list of reminders:

1. Write the problem down.
2. Translate the problem into plain English.
3. If possible, translate the problem into figures, mathematical symbols, or graphs.
4. Don't rely on your memory but use written or printed sources.

5. Know how to use a library.
6. Take notes and keep files.
7. Discuss the problem with others.
8. Use a check list of categories, adding new ones from time to time.
9. Try turning the problem upside down.
10. Don't be afraid of the ridiculous.
11. If you feel frustrated, don't worry. Relax; turn to other work; rest; sleep.
12. Take time to be by yourself. Free yourself of trivial work. Shut out interruptions.
13. Know the time of day your mind works best and arrange your schedule accordingly.
14. When you get an idea, write it down.

Further chapters discuss ways to get more out of reading, thinking in and around the home about family and quotidian things, what kind of thinking is best at work, and, finally, he reminds the reader that thinking can be difficult, that accepting common ways of doing things (even if in error) is often easier. He concludes the book: "…Life's problems are always new, and defy all ready-made solutions. That's what makes life interesting."

Especially notable for me were the discussions of Socratic and Aristotelian philosophy, how the latter's syllogistic logic was shaped to supply rules for a proper question-and-answer method of learning. Also particularly interesting was his discussion of how to parse any given text for its concreteness, which is essentially to say its soundness as a statement of fact. The method he proposes eventually worked itself into some standard readability tests that are still used today, e.g., the Flesch-Kincaid readability test.

Fathi demyati says

looooooooooool

Sam Pullen says

Undergrads should read this in research methods classes.