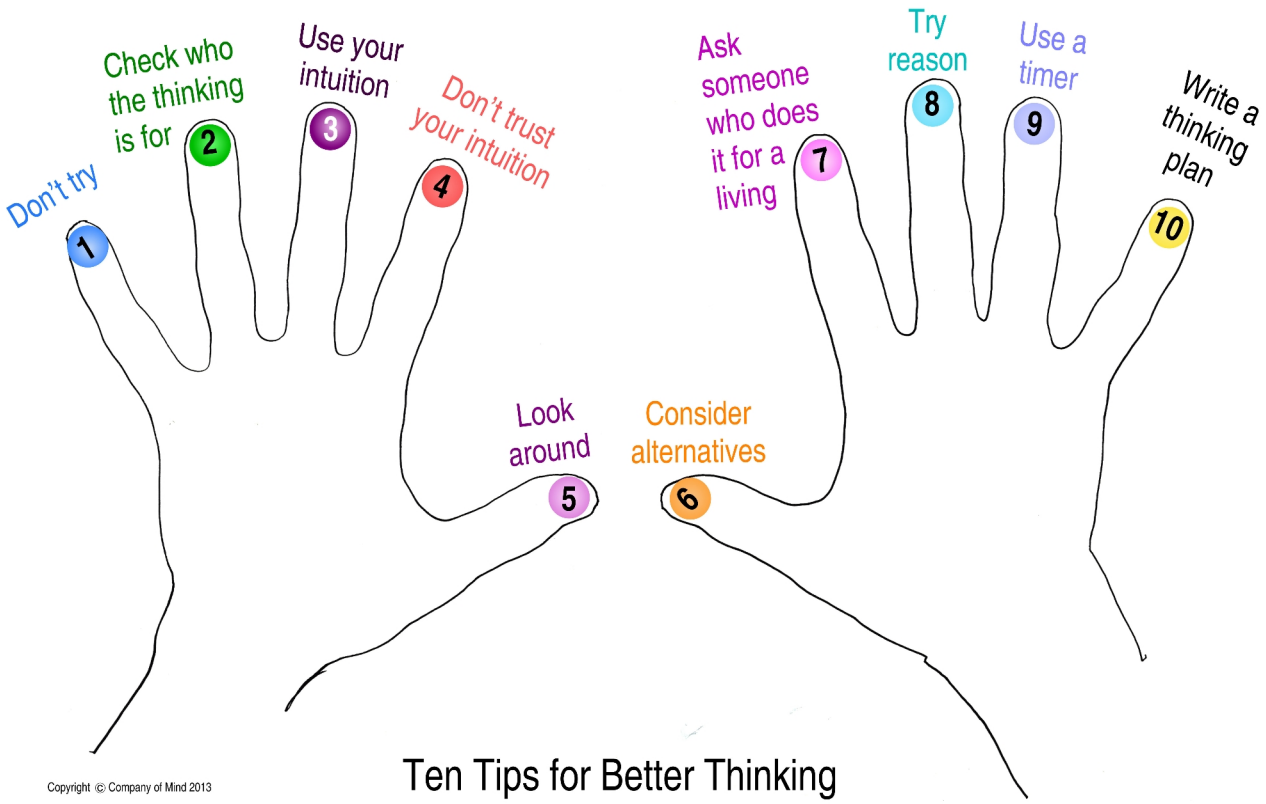
# Ten Tips for Better Thinking




## 1. Don't try

Ask if "*thinking*" is the right approach to this situation. If your goal is happiness for yourself and others, then enjoyment, acceptance, sharing, and empathy are more likely to get you there. On the other hand, if you're building a nuclear power station you'll surely regret not doing enough thinking.

## 2. Check who the thinking is for

Are you determined to impose the "*right answer*" in a situation where it's someone else's idea of "*right*" that matters? If so, listening is more important for you than thinking. It's rare to find an entrepreneur who doesn't project their own likes and dislikes onto statements about "*what customers want*".

## 3. Use your intuition

You have years of experience and expertise dissolved in your gut responses. If you've learnt well, those are a more sophisticated and faster guide than conscious thinking can match, so use your hunches. But be careful that the situation is one to which your experience is relevant. If in doubt check: list why you think it is, and why you think it isn't.

## 4. Don't trust your intuition

If the situation is new or unfamiliar, your gut response will likely be both strong and misleading. Know that your instincts will be wrong. If you've never been in a big fire or corporate merger, your gut response will likely be woefully inadequate – even if you imagine now that you'll know what to do.

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## 5. Look around

Are you too fixated on the current task, or the particular information you happen to have about it? A good saying to keep in mind is that "*anything you're paying attention to, is less important than you think it is*", so consider lifting your head up and taking a good look around.

## 6. Consider alternatives

When people come up with an answer, they're loathe to try looking for others – in fact they tend to dismiss any other ideas. So, ask yourself "*What else could it be?*" and come up with at least 2 viable alternative answers before pressing ahead.

## 7. Ask someone who does it for a living

Benefit from the massive life experience of others. If the task is one where other people's experience will be a good guide, seek them out. It is surprising how seldom that is done – we tend to think we should know the answers ourselves, for some reason.

## 8. Try reason

Reason and logic are very limited in practice, and seldom seem to convince other people either. However it's worth trying to see if they bring any clarity. Set out your thinking in terms of premisses, arguments and conclusions, and see how valid and compelling your argument looks in black and white.

## 9. Use a timer

It's easy to get distracted, so give yourself a set time to do the thinking – say 10 or 20 minutes. It will help you stay focused.

## 10. Write a thinking plan

If you were going on holiday, you'd plan where to go and what to do when you get there. Why not try the same thing with thinking? What's your destination, how are you going to get there, what thinking is needed? If you have 20 minutes, what should you do in each 5-minute segment? Write down how you are going to do the thinking, and try doing it.

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