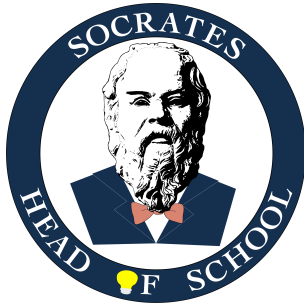


How To Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds by Alan Jacobs



Think you might want to read this book?

Alan Jacobs' *How to Think: A Survival Guide for a World at Odds* blends a practical approach to thinking with the structured, researched-based approach of an academic. Whether diagnosing past and current problems of human thinking or prescribing tailored solutions to these problems, Jacobs provides just the right information needed right now to rebuild and maintain the social fabric of our country (and our schools) while still pursuing truth in earnest. If you are looking for ammunition and tactics to promote your own political narratives and ideas, look elsewhere. If you are

willing to lean into discomfort, practice open mindedness, and you would like ideas about how one might promote effective civil discourse and genuine critical thinking in our country, schools, and classrooms, this book is for you.

What would Socrates ask?

- How can schools empower young learners to survive, thrive, and think effectively in a world at odds?
- What can be done about biases? How can we improve judgements and decisions, both our own and those of the schools that we serve and that serve us?
- How can we build schools that are bastions of open-minded discussion and civil discourse?

Research

- Harvard conducted an experiment where they asked participants to make a moral judgement on an issue. Some were not allowed to register their judgements until after a two minute period ended. Those who were forced to wait before making a judgement did a better job of recognizing flawed/poor arguments than the group allowed to respond immediately. (Source: *The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt, page 81)
- In *Descartes Error* Neuroscientist, Antonio Damsio, explains his discovery that when people have limited or nonexistent emotional responses to situations, their decision making is seriously compromised. His conclusion: reason alone is insufficient to make good decisions.

Concepts

- Our instinct for consensus and social approval encourages us to hang out in echo chambers repeating the internal, clubhouse jargon that results in the acceptance we crave. It also discourages us from speaking up in these spheres--whether online or in person--to offer a unique or critical comment that adds nuance to broad brush stroke thinking.
- Mutual trust and respect is needed for true, effective thinking to take place in the classroom. This is one of the utmost responsibilities of the modern teacher (especially the humanities teacher)--to create a safe, honest, civil, respectful, thoughtful, and rich environment for student discussion.
- The Inner Ring - An unwritten, informal group of people in an institution that--in addition to the formal authority structure of the organization--carries influence and

determines how the organization works. The drive to be accepted into this group often leads people to think in ways (including not thinking at all) that they otherwise would not think. Inner Rings can stifle creativity, questioning, and open minded thinking.

- More groups of like-hearted people (even if they are not like-minded) who practice listening and openness would lead to better thinking, more civility, and more productive discourse.
- Learning to feel goes hand in hand with learning to think.
- Code Switching - "...the ability to move between various dialects and levels of 'correctness,' the ability to communicate one way with peers and another way with teachers and another with family and another with T-ball coaches and so on." This is an important skill to develop in order to promote effective thinking in our divisive world. Learn to speak the language of those with whom you disagree. Understand their ideas in their language. Be willing to humanize them.

Quotes from the author

- "We have thought too much in recent years about the science of thinking and not enough about the art."
- "The person who genuinely wants to think will have to develop strategies for recognizing the subtlest of social pressures, confronting the pull of the ingroup and disgust from the outgroup. The person who wants to think will have to practice patience and master fear."
- "...simply knowing the forces that act on us to prevent genuine reflection, making an accurate diagnosis of our condition, is the first course of treatment." (As the first step toward learning how to think better)
- "To think independently of other people is impossible, and if it were possible it would be undesirable. Thinking is necessarily, thoroughly, and wonderfully social. Everything you think is a response to what someone else has thought and said. And when people commend someone for 'thinking for herself' they usually mean 'ceasing to sound like the people I dislike and starting to sound like people I approve of.'"
- "...there can be more genuine fellowship among those who share the same disposition than among those who share the same beliefs, especially if that disposition is toward kindness and generosity."
- "When people cease to be people because they are, to us, merely representatives or mouthpieces or positions we want to eradicate, then we, in our zeal to win, have sacrificed empathy: we have declined the opportunity to understand other people's desires, principles, fears. And that is a great price to pay for supposed 'victory' in debate."

Quotes from others

- "When the facts change, sir, I change my mind. What do *you* do?" - John Maynard Keynes (Apocryphal--when accused of flip flopping on a policy issue)

Implement tomorrow?

- "Give it Five Minutes" - Teach students to give it five minutes after they hear or read an opinion with which they disagree. This could be incorporated into a class discussion where students share their thoughts on a question or an issue. After encountering a different perspective, students can only focus on the merits of the argument/viewpoint during the first five minutes. Then they can think about how they disagree and make up

their transient mind before responding critically. A similar exercise could be applied to video and reading assignments.

- The “Steel Man” strategy for debates - One student presents her argument. Before the second student can present his own argument, he must summarize the first student’s argument to her satisfaction. This represents a good faith display of respect. After the first student approves of this retelling, the second student can share his own argument. Then, the first student must summarize the second student’s argument to his satisfaction before the debate ends. As a closure activity, all students can write a brief reflection following the [Living Room Conversations](#) model of reflection.

Organizations/schools working on answers

- [Living Room Conversations](#)
- [AllSides](#)
- [The Flip Side](#)
- [The Long Now Foundation](#)

Gateways to further learning

- [“Critical Thinking About Critical Thinking”](#) by Patrick Deneen
- [“Unfollow”](#) by Adrian Chen

Referenced books with the potential to impact leading and learning in education

Author(s) Last Name	Title
Kahneman	<i>Thinking Fast and Slow</i>
Haidt	<i>The Happiness Hypothesis: Finding Modern Truth in Ancient Wisdom</i>
Haidt	<i>The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion</i>
Ariely	<i>Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions</i>

The applicability of this book to education is



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