

A thinking skills questionnaire

Thinking skills and problem-solving skills are critically essential as we face an uncertain and opportunity-filled future.

As lower-skilled and repetitive jobs disappear (e.g. cleaners, factory workers, laundry workers, etc) and working from home becomes more popular, new types of jobs are being created every day, and more young people than ever are becoming entrepreneurs and creating their own businesses.

More and more employers will be looking for employees who can work on their own and have great problem-solving skills, particularly with environmental and social issues.

How are your problem-solving skills? Have a go at this questionnaire, then check the results section at the end to see where you shine and where more work is needed to fill in any skill gaps.



QUESTIONS

1 You're driving through a rural area late at night, in the rain, when your car suddenly breaks down. You don't know what's wrong with it, and you can't call anyone for help because your phone battery is flat. The nearest town is 20km away, and no one is expecting you home till tomorrow. How do you feel and what do you do?

- a) I feel angry. I kick the car and swear a lot. I end up sleeping on the back seat. In the morning, I wait till another vehicle appears on the road and wave the driver down to ask them for help.
- b) I feel unhappy and anxious. I sleep in the car. In the morning, I wait and hope that someone will come rescue me.
- c) I am frustrated and mad. I beat myself up for getting into such a stupid mess. I think of all the things I should have done, like making sure my phone was charged and that my flatmates / family knew I was coming back earlier. I then wait by the side of road and wave down the first person who drives past, either to ask for a ride into town or to ask if I can use their phone to ring someone to come get me.
- d) I feel annoyed, but I try to work out a solution. If I can't come up with anything, I'll start walking to the town. It'll only take a few hours to walk 20km. In town, I can find a way to contact my flatmates / whānau for a ride.
- e) I keep calm and get the car manual out to see if I can work out the issue. I also keep an eye out for passing cars to wave down with my torch. If anyone stops, I'll ask them to help me look at the car. If they can't help, I'll ask them to ring a friend or whānau member who can come get me and tow the car home for me. If that doesn't work either, I'll wait with the car till the morning, then walk into the nearest town for help.
- f) Other.

2 If you were facing a problem that wasn't easy to figure out, how would you feel and act?

- a) I would feel angry, and I would most likely choose to ignore the problem and assume someone else will sort it out.
- b) I would feel worried. I would want to do something but wouldn't feel confident enough to do so. I tend to do nothing and hope things will sort themselves out (or that someone else will sort it for me).
- c) I would feel concerned. If I caused the problem, I would probably try and sort it out. If it's not my problem to sort, I would tell someone else about it.
- d) I would feel responsible and feel like I should do something about it. I would try and solve the problem and would probably get some help if needed.
- e) I would feel interested. I see problems like puzzles, which I tend to obsess over until I solve them. I really like to solve problems; it gives me a real sense of satisfaction.
- f) Other.

3 When defining a problem, it's important to be able separate facts from assumptions or opinions. Imagine you cook hangi for a living. One day, a regular customer cancels their weekly order. Your boss wants to know why. How would you go about finding that out?

- a) I wouldn't bother talking to the customer. I'd just tell the boss that they've had enough of hangi. People shouldn't have to give an excuse.
- b) I wouldn't ask the customer directly. Instead, I'd ask one of their friends or neighbours who also get our hangi. That said, I'd also assume they just want a break from weekly hangi food.
- c) I would flick the customer a text to ask what the problem was but wouldn't expect a response. Maybe it was just getting to be too expensive for them.
- d) I would give the customer a ring and ask if there was a problem. If so, I'd try to find out if I could fix it for them.
- e) I would go and see the customer in person. I'd tell them that they are one of our favourite customers and that we're concerned they've cancelled their order. I'd also let them know that we are keen to understand whether there was a problem that we could sort out for them.
- f) Other.

4 Imagine you're in charge of a wedding catering team. The mother of the bride comes into the catering tent to tell you that she doesn't like the table decorations and wants them changed right away. She says she had asked for something stylish and sophisticated, but what she sees is ugly and cheap. You have two hours before the guests arrive. What do you do?

- a) Ignore her. It's too late to make any changes.
- b) I get upset and try to explain to her that, as much as I would like to sort out her request, there just isn't enough time left. Why didn't she tell me sooner?
- c) I feel a mix of frustration and worry. I do what I can in the two hours available to make the tables look a little more attractive.
- d) I keep a level head and gather my three most experienced staff for a quick meeting. Together we work out a solution. I then give instructions to the rest of the team.
- e) I call the whole team together and discuss the problem. We take 10 minutes to brainstorm possible ideas. After quickly going through the options, we pick one or two, then I get everyone to make the changes as quickly as possible!
- f) Other.

5 How would you describe your approach to solving problems?

- a) I will either ignore the problem or destroy it. Like if a person creates problems for me, I will just cut them out of my life. If something breaks, I'll chuck it.
- b) I worry about problems because I'm not confident about being able to solve them. I have an avoidance style, hoping that problems will sort themselves out or that someone will come and sort them for me.
- c) I have an OK approach. Depends how complicated or big the problem is.
- d) I usually think through problems before acting. I could get better at brainstorming more options so I can find smarter solutions.
- e) I approach problems carefully and with a well-thought out plan. I am quite creative with ideas and options, and I'm reasonably confident at being able to select the best idea and act on it.
- f) Other.

6 Being impulsive means jumping into things before you've thought through the possible consequences. For example, taking the work van to call in on a mate when you should be making a quick drop-off of extra supplies at the building site. How good are you at thinking through consequences before you act?

- a) Thinking? I prefer to act first then deal with the consequences later.
- b) Not so great. I get nervous when making decisions, so I tend to put off have to decide, and then I end up having to rush. Like when I'm in the car, working out if it's OK to enter the intersection, and people are tooting at me because I'm not going, so I pull out quickly and almost hit another car.
- c) Depends. I try to think before I act, but in an emotionally charged situation (like if I thought someone was hitting on my boy / girlfriend), I would probably react without thinking it through properly.
- d) Pretty good. I mostly think before I act. I don't like having to clean up a mess that could have been avoided if I had taken some time to think it through first. For instance, checking the oil in the car, or making sure the river was deep enough to dive in or stopping myself taking something that is not mine (even if I can convince myself I'm just borrowing it).
- e) Other.

7 Do you take responsibility for problems that you've made (or helped make)?

- a) No. If I can get someone else to take responsibility, that's just fine with me.
- b) Not really. I don't like the weight of responsibility. I feel crushed by it, so I try to find someone to take it off me.
- c) I guess so. I will reluctantly take responsibility if I created the problem. It is not very often that it's just one person's fault, though, so I'm always keen to share the responsibility.
- d) Yes. I don't always know what to do, but I'm happy to own up and accept the consequences.
- e) Yes. I am pretty good at accepting responsibility for the problem and for coming up with a solution. It's all about keeping your mana intact.
- f) Other.

8 Sometimes decisions are not easy to make. For instance, let's say you've had a big weekend and are feeling too tired to go to work on Monday morning. You know this will mean your workmates will have to work harder to make up for your absence, and your paycheck will be lower than normal because you've used up all your sick leave. Do you go to work or do you stay home?

a) I do what suits me. You have to look after yourself because nobody else will.

b) I argue with myself. I know what the right thing to do is, but I would probably stay in bed and spend the day feeling guilty for letting other people down.

c) It would depend on how I am feeling about work and the people there. If they are my mates, I would probably make the effort to get up and go to work. If not, I'd probably stay in bed and face the consequences.

d) I drag myself out of bed and go in to work. I might have a bad attitude and work slowly for the day, though.

e) I wouldn't even think about not going in to work. I couldn't let my work or my whānau down. Living your values and caring for your family is important.

f) Other.

9 Being able to ask for advice is a critical skill, both in life and at work. Employers appreciate it when their employees ask smart questions because it shows they'll be able to do the job well. It also creates opportunities for the boss to reflect on how they are doing things. It's possible a question could lead to a change in how a service is delivered or how stock is managed. How good are you at asking for advice?

a) Terrible. Don't like doing it.

b) Not great. I'm a bit too shy / whakamā to ask questions.

c) OK. Depends on how I'm feeling and the relationship I have with the person I'd be talking to.

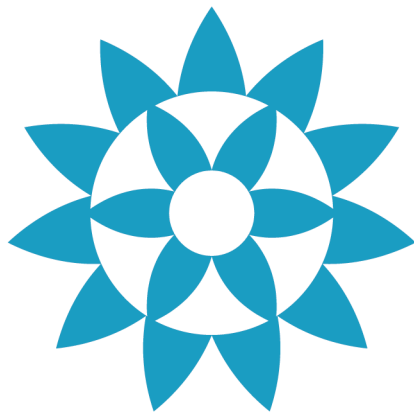
d) Pretty good. I don't know everything and getting advice is a smart thing to do. It's not something I enjoy, though, so I'll only do it if necessary.

e) I am absolutely fine with asking for advice. It's how you learn, how you get ahead, and the boss seems to like the questions. It also shows that I'm interested in doing a good job.

f) Other.

10 Some money has disappeared from the till, and the boss is looking for everyone to help sort the problem. What would you do in this situation?

- a) I'd sit back and let the supervisor sort it out.
- b) I wouldn't be confident enough to contribute much, so I'd just stay quiet.
- c) Depends on my position in the team really, but I'd make sure I had a say regardless.
- d) I would encourage people to think of the team and not their individual needs.
- e) I would take a leadership role and bring everyone together to find a solution.
- f) Other.



RESULTS

Now take a few moments to look back over your answers. Do you notice any patterns in the way you responded to these questions?

If you mostly chose As

You really need to work on your critical thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills. You don't like dealing with problems, as they can make you angry. You often avoid issues and don't try to sort them out. It would seem that you don't like to accept responsibility for your problems or think about the consequences of your actions either. This behaviour is not going to help you in life or at work. It would be useful for you to practice calmly looking at your options when there is a problem and planning out how you're going to fix it. Take a look at the resources; they'll be able to show you how to use your thinking and decision-making skills to solve problems in the future.

If you mostly chose Bs

You usually feel anxious, fearful or nervous about problems and having to use your decision-making and thinking skills to solve them. You might avoid having to work on the problem and might wait for someone else to do it if it seems like too much for you to handle. It would be helpful for you to build up your confidence in making decisions and believing that you can overcome problems. Check out the resources to see how you can be more confident with your thinking and in your decision-making, so you can take charge of those problem situations and sort them out.

If you mostly chose Cs

It seems like your approach depends on the situation. For you it depends on how complicated or big the problem is, or if you see the problem as your responsibility or not. You should not be looking at problems in this way. Sometimes in life, you'll need to fix problems whether you want to or not, especially at work. Instead of looking at the size of the problem, or if the problem affects you, and then deciding if you want to do something about it, you should practice trying to solve the problem anyway. The resources can help you better use your thinking and decision-making skills to solve those difficult problems.

If you mostly chose Ds

You are pretty good at using your thinking and decision-making skills to solve problems, but you might need to work a little more on weighting up all your options when trying to solve a problem. You might also be tempted to make impulsive decisions. The resources will give you some awesome tips on brainstorming options for problems so you can tackle them with no stress.

If you mostly chose Es

You are a pro at using your problem-solving, decision-making and thinking skills. You approach problems carefully and with a well thought out plan. Keep up the good work! Take a look at the resources to see how you could develop those skills even more so that no problem is too big for you to handle!