



# How Intelligent People Process Information

MASTERCLASS 1

MODULE 1 — INTELLECTUAL DISTINCTION TRACK

Domain: Critical & Analytical Thinking

Core Question: Why do intelligent people still arrive at weak conclusions?

# Why This Session Matters

## In School

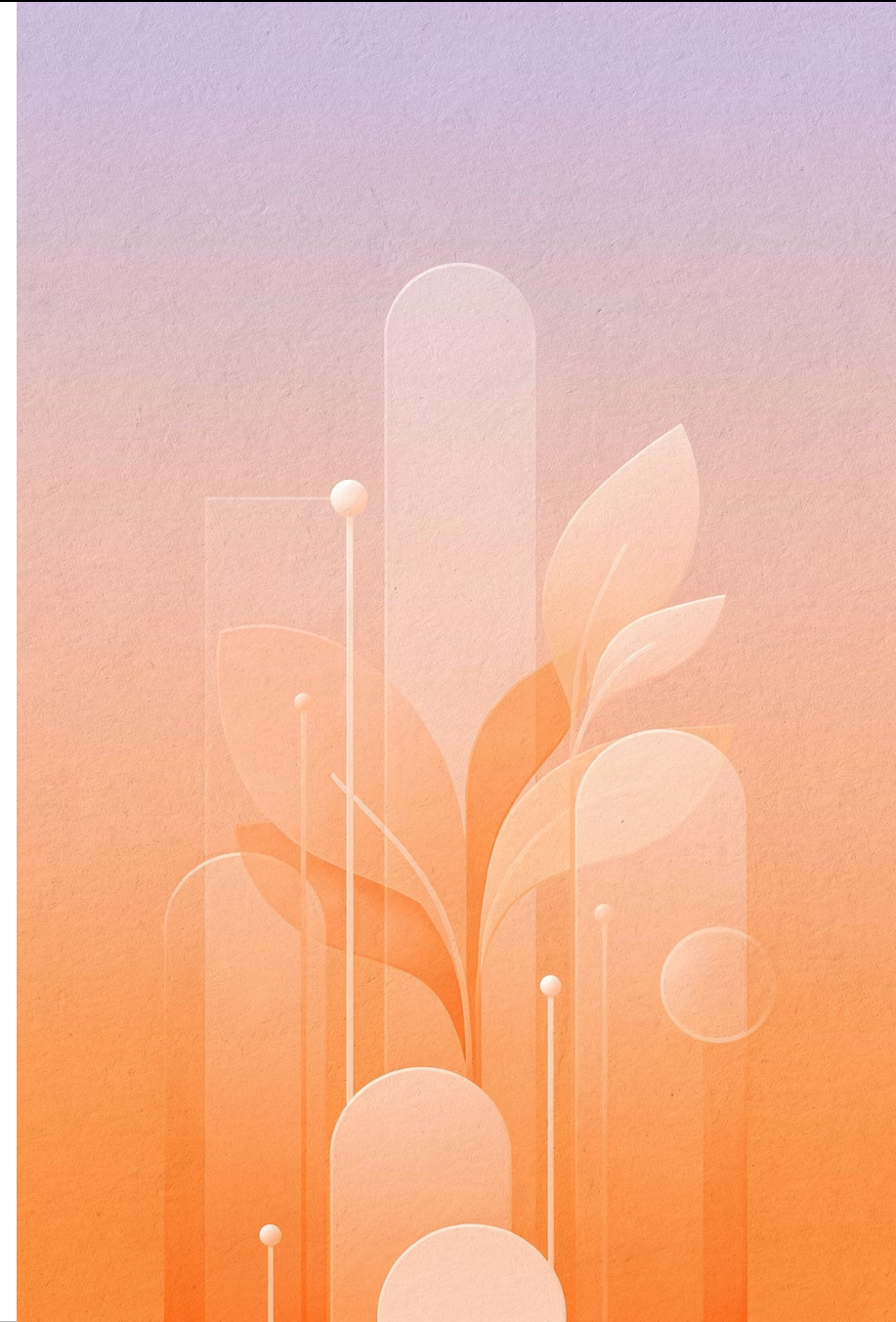
Students are rewarded for **answers** — finding the right response quickly, meeting the expected outcome, and demonstrating recall.

## In University & the Real World

People are rewarded for something far more demanding. Success depends on the ability to:

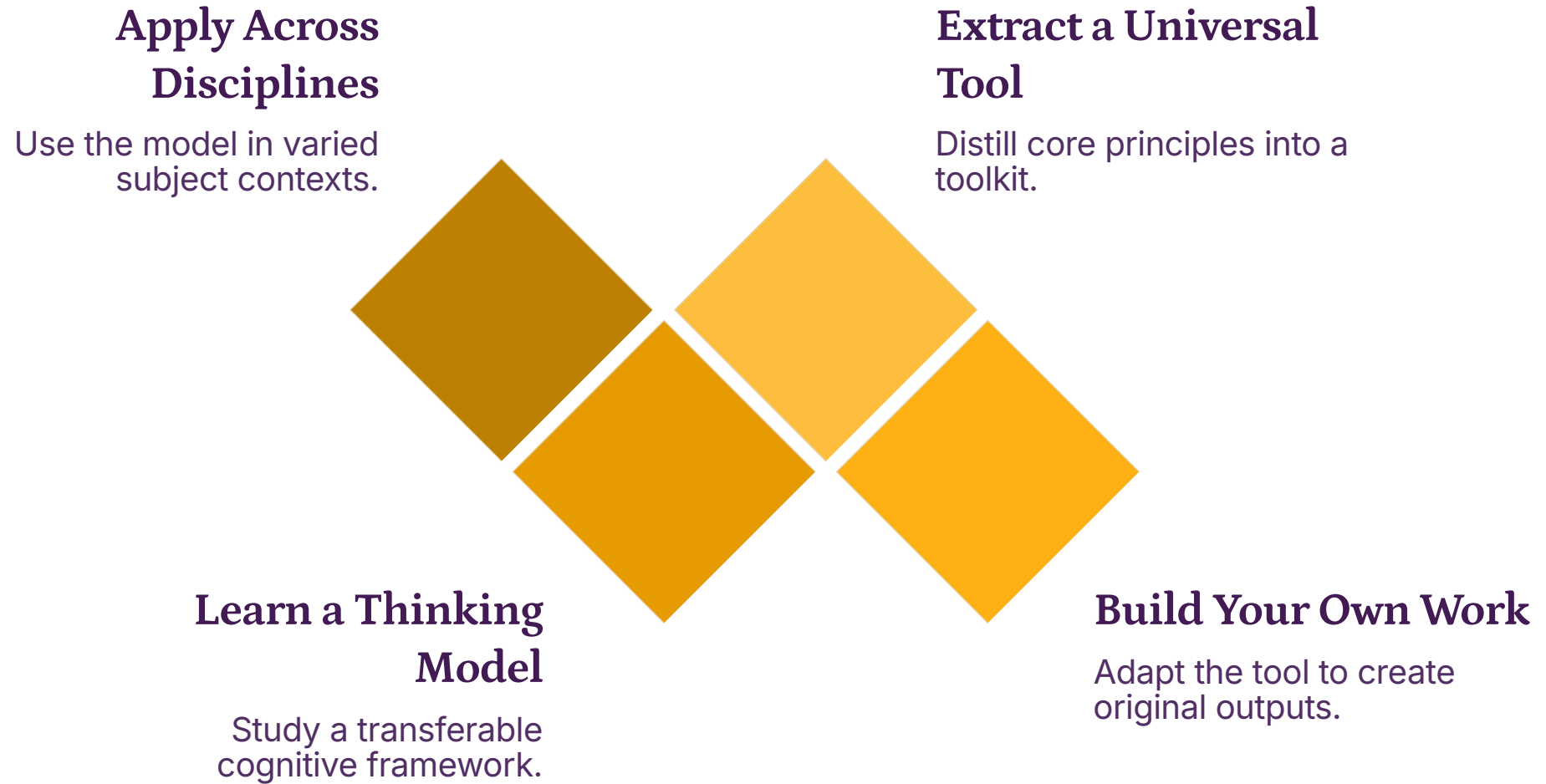
- Analyse arguments rigorously
- Test evidence before accepting it
- Think with precision and discipline
- Defend ideas confidently under challenge

This session builds the foundation of **academic thinking** — the shift from knowing to reasoning.



# How This Session Works

In this Masterclass, you are not learning subjects separately. You are learning how to **think across subjects** — developing a universal cognitive toolkit that travels with you into every discipline.



Each stage reinforces the last. We are not switching subjects — we are applying the same rigorous thinking process in different contexts, building transferable intellectual habits.

# Session Objectives

By the end of this session, students will have developed core skills in analytical reasoning. These objectives form the bedrock of academic judgement across all disciplines.



## Distinguish Claim vs Evidence

Separate what is being argued from what actually supports it.



## Identify Weak Reasoning

Spot the logical gaps, assumptions, and flaws in everyday arguments.



## Evaluate Arguments Critically

Weigh evidence against claims with discipline and intellectual honesty.



## Construct an Academic Position

Begin forming defensible, evidence-grounded positions of your own.

# The Thinking Gap

There is a measurable difference between how most students engage with information and how strong thinkers approach the same material. Understanding this gap is the first step to closing it.

## Most Students

- Accept information quickly without scrutiny
- Rely on how *confident* something sounds rather than whether it is accurate
- Repeat ideas they have encountered rather than testing them

## Strong Thinkers

- **Pause** — resist the urge to accept at face value
- **Question** — probe assumptions beneath the surface
- **Evaluate** — weigh the quality of evidence and logic



# A Provocation

Before we examine the thinking model, consider these three claims. Your first instinct may be to agree — or disagree — strongly. Hold that instinct. Ask yourself: *why* does this feel convincing?

“  
"Social media is destroying teenage mental health."  
”

“  
"Technology is making students less intelligent."  
”

“  
"Success at school depends mostly on natural talent."  
”

# Unpacking the Provocation

These statements feel convincing — but feeling convinced is not the same as being correct. Each of these claims relies on specific rhetorical techniques that bypass careful reasoning.

## Generalisation

Broad sweeping claims that ignore exceptions, nuance, and context. They sound decisive but sacrifice accuracy for simplicity.

## Emotional Framing

Language designed to trigger concern, fear, or pride — steering the listener toward agreement before evidence has been considered.

## Familiar Narratives

Claims that echo widely held assumptions feel true because we have heard them before — not because they have been verified.

 **Key Insight:** Convincing does not mean correct. Strong thinkers learn to separate persuasion from proof.

# The Thinking Model

Strong thinkers do not simply react to information — they apply a structured process of evaluation. This five-step model forms the foundation of academic judgement and can be applied to any argument, in any discipline.

01

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## Identify the Claim

What is the argument actually asserting? Strip away the language and find the core proposition.

02

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## Examine the Evidence

What is offered to support the claim? Is it specific, relevant, and sufficient?

03

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## Check the Source

Who is making the claim? What is their authority, potential bias, or agenda?

04

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## Consider Alternatives

Are there other explanations, interpretations, or perspectives that could equally account for the evidence?

05

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## Evaluate the Reasoning

Does the evidence logically lead to the conclusion? Are there gaps or leaps in the argument?

# Macbeth: Ambition or Something More?

Claim: "**Macbeth is purely ambitious.**" This is one of the most common interpretations students repeat — but does the text actually support it without qualification?

1

## Support the Claim

What specific textual evidence suggests ambition as Macbeth's dominant motivation? Which scenes, speeches, or actions point here?

2

## Find the Contradictions

Which moments reveal guilt, fear, or reluctance? How do these complicate a purely ambitious reading?

3

## Explore Alternatives

Could the text support readings centred on manipulation, masculinity, or psychological fragility instead?

- ❑ **Insight:** Interpretation must always be tested against evidence — not assumed from reputation or familiarity.



# Why Did Rome Fall?

Claim: "**The Roman Empire collapsed due to moral decline.**" This is a persistent historical narrative — but does it hold up under scrutiny? Strong historical thinking demands we weigh competing explanations.

## Moral Decline

The traditional narrative: corruption, decadence, and civic collapse from within. Compelling — but is it supported by the strongest evidence?

## Military Overstretch

An empire too vast to defend, with overstretched legions and escalating costs — a structural, not moral, explanation.

## Economic Pressures

Inflation, trade disruption, and taxation collapse — economic historians argue these were primary drivers.

## External Pressures

Migrations and invasions from outside: the Visigoths, Vandals, and Huns played decisive roles that internal decline alone cannot explain.

 **Insight:** History requires weighing competing explanations — not selecting the most memorable one.

# Does Minimum Wage Increase Unemployment?

Claim: "**Minimum wage increases unemployment.**" This is a staple of introductory economics — but applying the thinking model reveals it is far more contested than it first appears.

## What does the data say?

Some studies show modest job losses in certain sectors. Others, including Card & Krueger's landmark research, found negligible or no effect.

## Does context matter?

Outcomes differ significantly between high-cost urban markets and low-wage rural economies. A universal claim ignores this variation.

## What other variables exist?

Automation, consumer demand, sector type, and employer size all affect outcomes — independently of wage levels.

## Insight

Economic thinking requires both **data and context**. A claim that is true in one environment may be false — or even reversed — in another.

The strongest economic thinkers do not simply cite the claim. They specify the conditions under which it holds.

# The Argument Test

This is the universal tool extracted from every discipline we have examined. Apply it to any argument — academic, journalistic, political, or personal — and it will reveal its strength or weakness immediately.

## Claim

What is being argued? Is it clearly stated, or buried in vague language?

## Evidence

What supports it? Is the evidence specific, credible, and sufficient to bear the weight of the claim?

## Reasoning

Does the evidence logically connect to the conclusion? Are there unstated assumptions or leaps of logic?

📌 **If any one of these three elements fails, the argument weakens — regardless of how confidently it is delivered.**

# Guided Task: Analyse a Claim

Apply the Argument Test to a claim provided by your instructor. Working individually or in pairs, use the framework below to structure your analysis. You have **8 minutes**.

**1**

## Identify the Claim

State precisely what the argument is asserting. Avoid paraphrasing loosely — precision matters.

**2**

## Assess the Evidence

What evidence is offered? Is it specific and credible, or general and anecdotal?

**3**

## Evaluate the Reasoning

Does the evidence logically support the claim? Where does the logic hold — and where does it strain?

**4**

## Identify What Is Missing

What counterevidence, alternative explanations, or contextual factors are absent from the argument?

# Upgrading Your Thinking

The difference between weak and strong academic thinking is not intelligence — it is precision. Consider how the same idea can be expressed at two very different levels of intellectual rigour.

## LEVEL 1 THINKING

"Homework should be banned."

This is an opinion stated as a conclusion. It offers no evidence, no reasoning, and no acknowledgement of complexity. It cannot be defended under challenge.

## LEVEL 4 THINKING

"Research suggests that excessive homework reduces sleep and sustained attention, which may negatively impact academic performance — particularly in secondary school students."

Notice the difference: **evidence** grounds the claim, **reasoning** connects cause to effect, and **precision** qualifies the scope appropriately.

# Why Do Weak Arguments Survive?

If the Argument Test is straightforward, why do poorly constructed arguments persist — and often succeed? Understanding the mechanisms that sustain weak reasoning is itself a critical thinking skill.



## Emotional Appeal

Arguments that trigger fear, pride, or moral outrage bypass rational evaluation. Emotion moves people faster than evidence.



## Confirmation Bias

People instinctively favour information that aligns with existing beliefs, and resist evidence that challenges them.



## Lack of Challenge

Without a culture of respectful questioning, weak arguments go untested and accumulate the authority of repetition.



## Repetition

Repeated exposure to an idea increases its perceived credibility — regardless of whether the evidence behind it has improved.

Discussion: Is it harder to question ideas you already believe — or ideas you have never encountered before?

# Artefact 1: Analytical Position Paper

This is your first formal output from the Intellectual Distinction Track. It is not a summary — it is a structured analytical position. Aim for **150–200 words**, written with precision and academic register.



## Central Question

State the question your position paper will address. It should be genuinely debatable — not something with a simple factual answer.



## Two Evidence Sources

Identify two pieces of evidence that support your position. These should be specific, relevant, and credible.



## Initial Position

State your current position clearly and concisely. This is your argument — it should be defensible under scrutiny.



## One Counterargument

Acknowledge the strongest objection to your position. Engaging honestly with opposition strengthens — not weakens — your argument.

# Reflection & Extension

## Reflection

Consider the central question from this session:

What makes an argument **trustworthy** rather than merely *persuasive*?

Think carefully about the distinction. Persuasion can be achieved through emotion, repetition, and framing alone. Trust must be earned through evidence, logic, and intellectual honesty.

## Extension Task

Find an article — from a newspaper, website, or academic source — and apply the Argument Test independently.

- **Identify** the central claim
- **Locate** the evidence offered
- **Find** one logical flaw, assumption, or gap

Bring your analysis to the next session. Be prepared to defend your evaluation.

