

Critical Thinking Skills:

Types, Patterns, and Examples



- Why critical thinking is a high-stakes capability today



- Recognize skill types, apply thinking patterns, evaluate evidence



- Spot bias and practice with realistic scenarios



- Connect reasoning to decision quality and problem-solving



- Ask judgment, not creativity, logic, or systems thinking alone



Why Critical Thinking Matters at Work



- 76% of U.S. job postings request at least one durable skill



- Critical thinking is a top cited competency across sectors



- 94% of hiring managers favor entry-level critical thinkers



- AI outputs still require human judgment to reduce risk

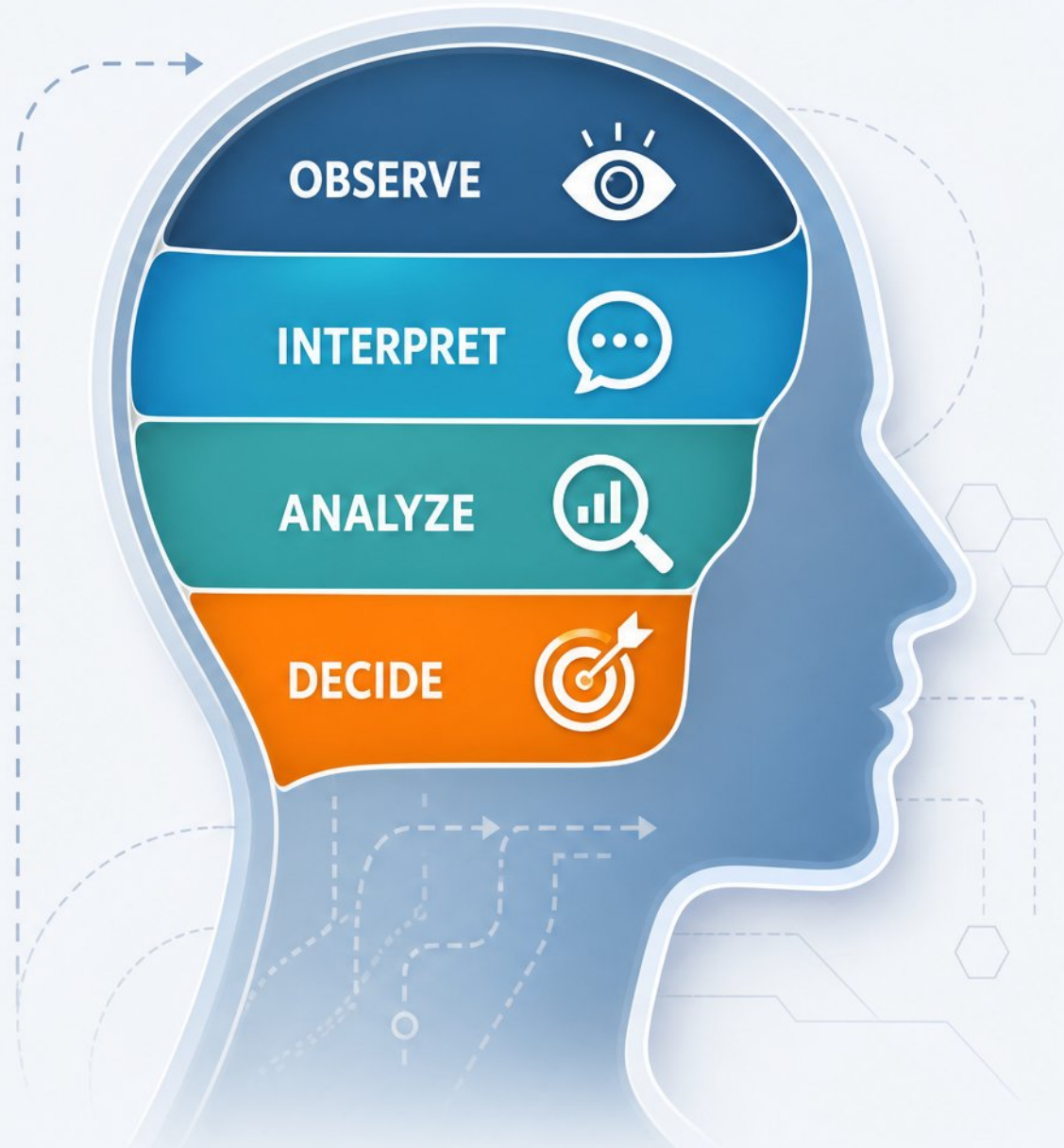


- Skipping structured reasoning hides assumptions and weak claims



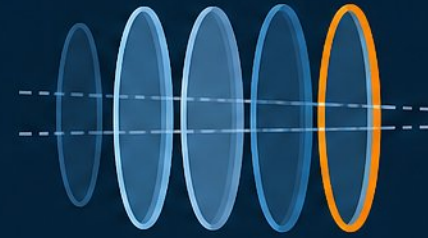
A Working Definition of Critical Thinking

- Actively using information, experience, observation, and reasoning before acting
- Four core moves: interpret, analyze, evaluate, and infer
- Both a skill set and a mindset: open-mindedness and reflective self-correction
- Distinct from creative thinking and formal logic





Core Types of Critical Thinking



Analytical:

- Breaking problems into testable parts and seeing relationships



Evaluative:

- Judging sources, claims, and evidence against clear criteria



Inferential:

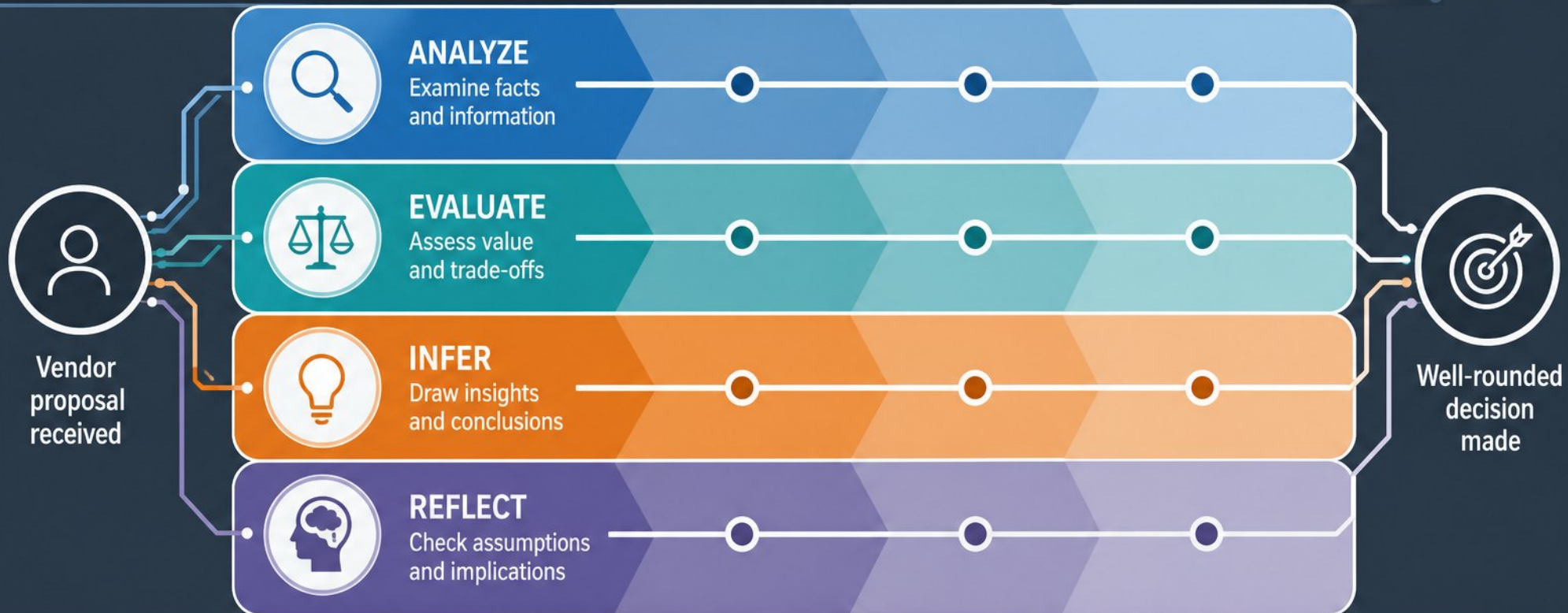
- Drawing warranted conclusions from incomplete information



Reflective:

- Monitoring your own assumptions and reasoning process

How the Types Work Together

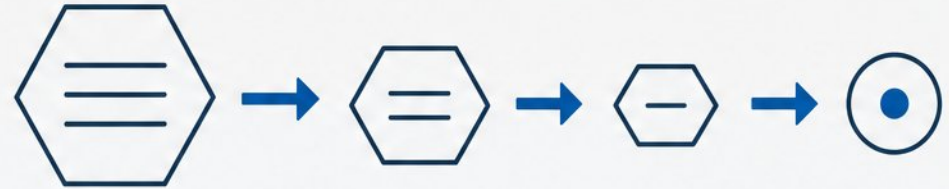


- Four lenses are practice modes, not isolated stages
- Typical flow: analyze, evaluate, infer, then reflect
- Example: manager reviews a vendor proposal end-to-end
- Shift lenses to avoid overanalysis or premature judgment
- Reflection catches assumptions before final decisions

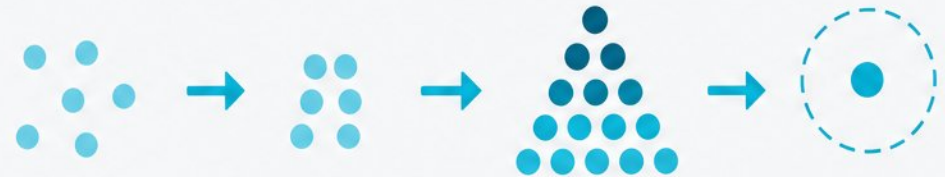
Recognizing Reasoning Patterns



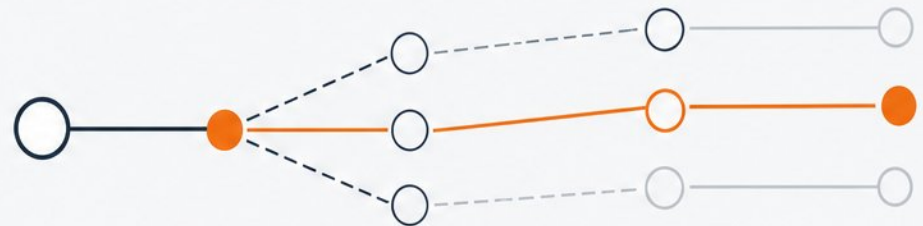
- **Deductive reasoning:**
apply general rules to specific cases



- **Inductive reasoning:**
generalize from specific data and trends



- **Abductive reasoning:**
find the most plausible explanation with limited info



- **Avoid flawed patterns:**
circular reasoning, false dichotomy, hasty generalization

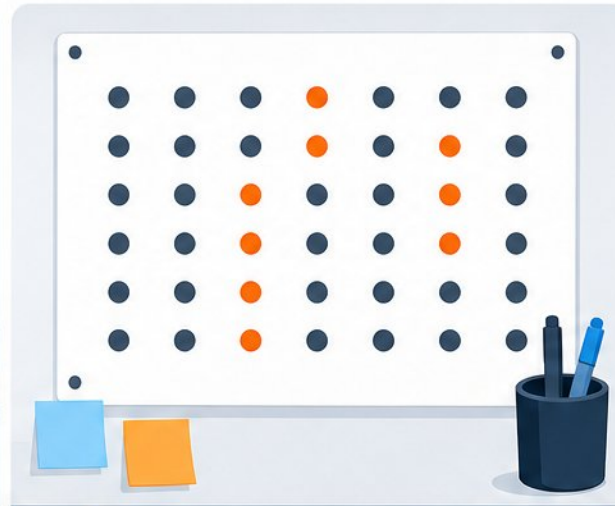


Matching Patterns to Workplace Problems



Deductive Fit

Apply rules to specific cases



Inductive Fit

Find trends across data



Abductive Fit

Diagnose surprising results

- ✓ Deductive fit: applying rules or standards to specific cases
- ✓ Inductive fit: finding trends across project performance data
- ✓ Abductive fit: diagnosing surprising results with limited information
- ✓ Switch patterns to test ideas, compare evidence, and stay open
- ✓ Use deduction to explicate, induction to verify, abduction to generate



Asking Better Questions



- **Clarifying questions** surface assumptions, missing definitions, and ambiguous terms before analysis begins



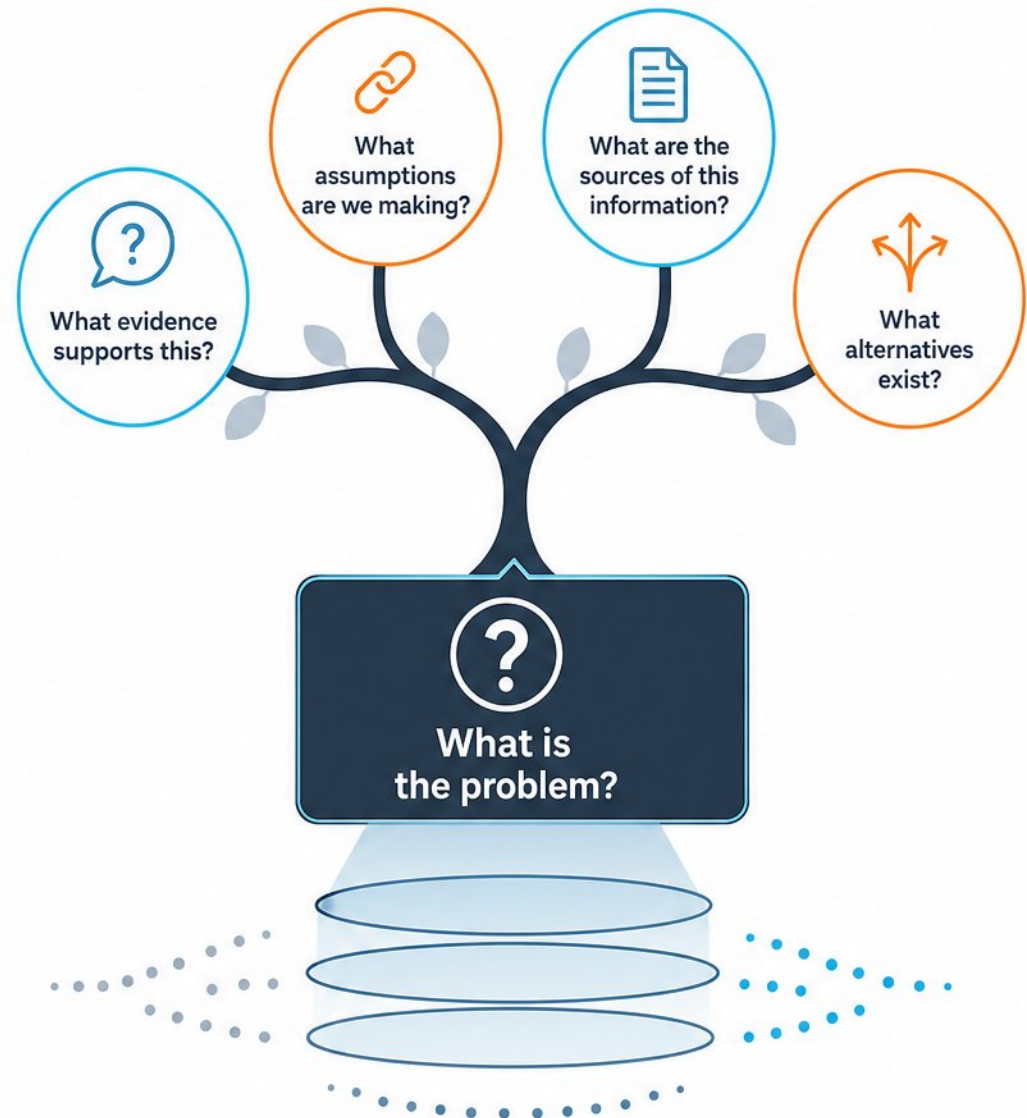
- **Probing questions** test evidence, sources, causal claims, and the strength of underlying reasoning



- **Reusable question set:** what is the problem, what evidence supports this, what alternatives exist



- **Questioning** can be framed as curiosity and decision quality rather than personal challenge





Evaluating Evidence and Sources



VERIFICATION CHECKLIST



- Distinguish evidence from opinion, anecdote, and authority claims before acting



- Assess credibility, relevance, accuracy, timeliness, and source interest



- Watch for cherry-picked data, misleading comparisons, and unsupported conclusions



- Use a practical checklist: identify source, check context, verify with another credible source

Cognitive Biases That Disrupt Reasoning



- Mental shortcuts create systematic errors under pressure



- High-impact biases: confirmation, anchoring, availability, sunk cost



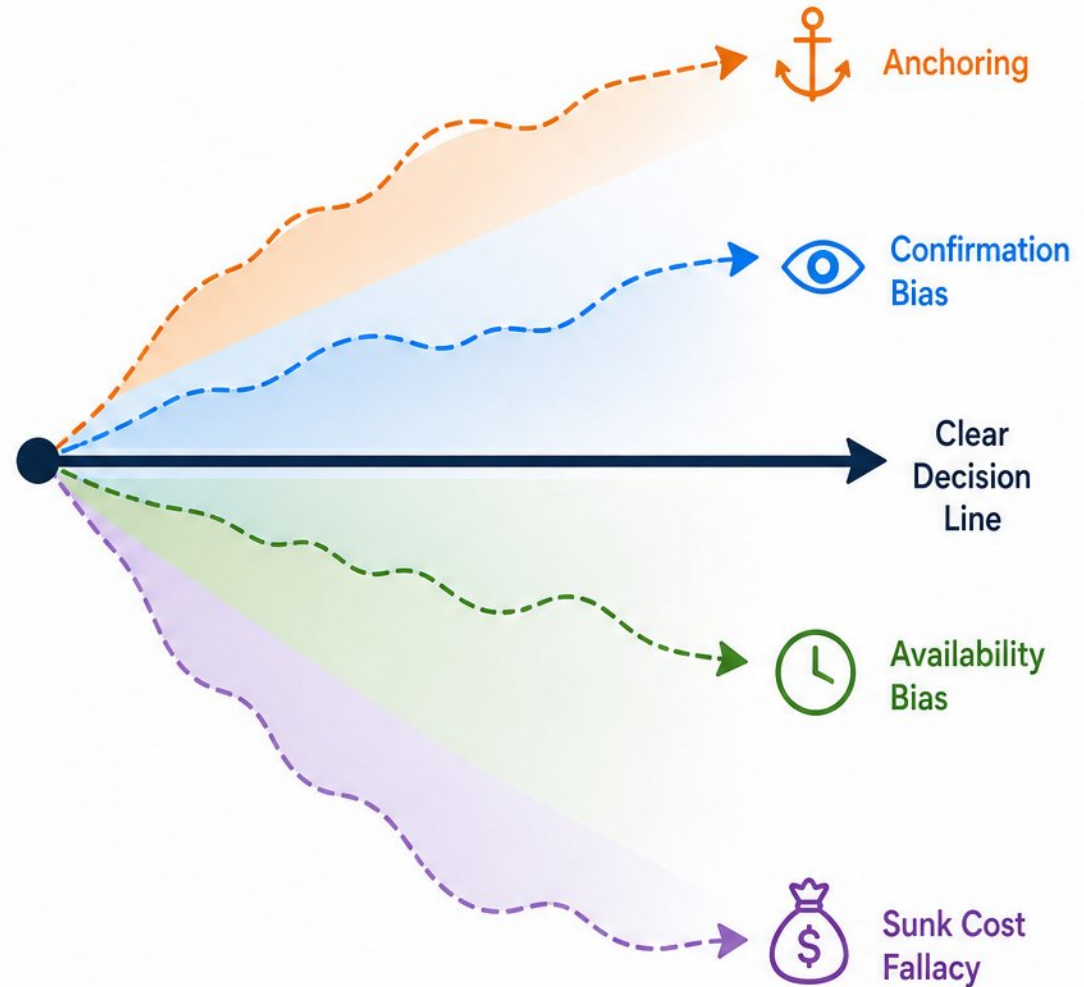
- Warning signs: first numbers dominate, recent events outweigh long-term data



- Past investment should not determine future decisions



- Debiasing: independent estimates, pre-mortems, structured formats, stop criteria



Patterns of Strong Arguments



- Sound arguments include a claim, evidence, reasoning, and qualification



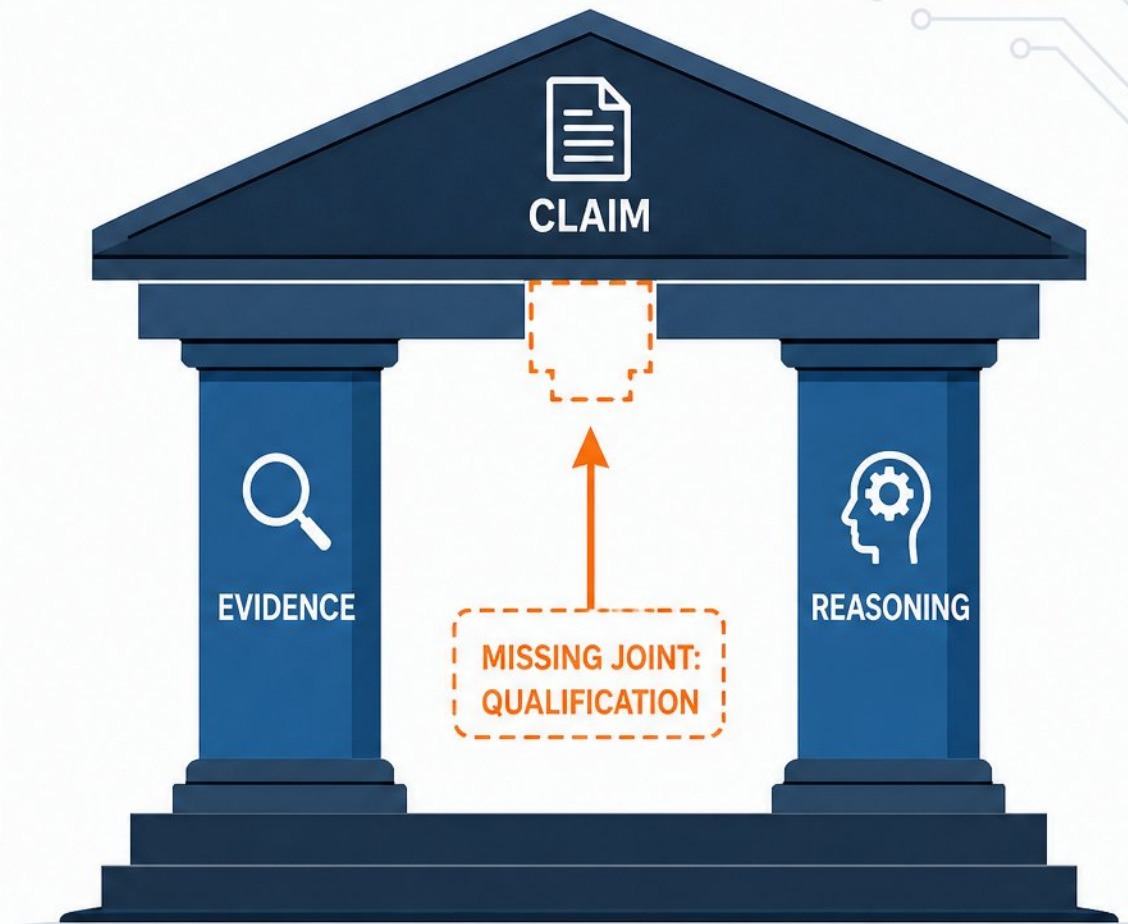
- Watch for unsupported assertions, overgeneralizations, and missing premises



- Evaluate the strongest version of an argument, not the weakest



- Argument mapping exposes hidden gaps in logical structure





Applying Critical Thinking in Real Scenarios



- **Manager:** vendor proposal review under deadline



- **Analyst:** choose best explanation for conflicting data



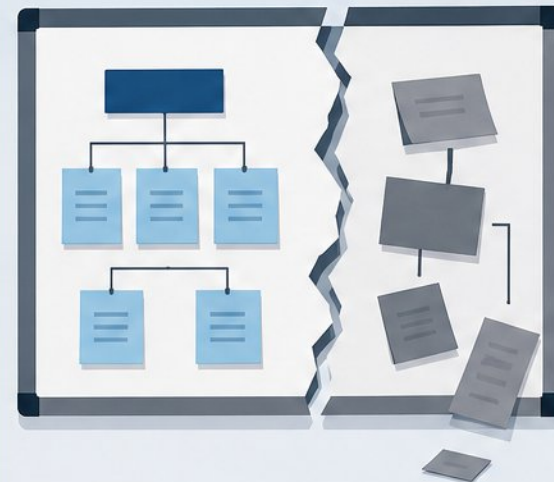
- **Project team:** kill or continue a struggling initiative



- **Educator:** design assignments requiring reasoning and judgment



- **Practice:** interpret, evaluate, infer, then reflect



Interpret



Evaluate



Infer



Reflect

Building a Team Critical Thinking Habit



- Make questioning and evidence review routine via challenger roles and pre-mortems



- Separate idea generation from evaluation to avoid premature dismissal



- Use lightweight templates for documenting assumptions, evidence, and decisions



- Monitor improvement: fewer escalations, more assumptions surfaced, better documented reasoning



Action Plan and Practice Guide

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Choose one reasoning pattern and one bias to observe in your next discussion

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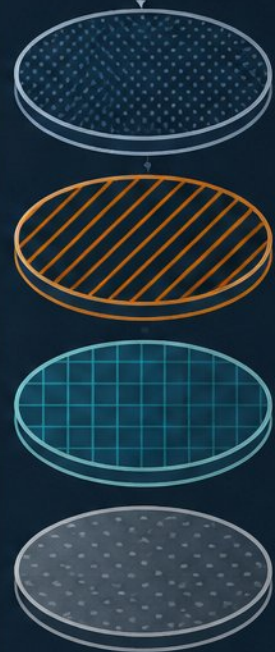
Apply the evidence checklist before making a committed decision

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Use a structured question set in a meeting and a pre-mortem before a major initiative

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Reinforce learning with deliberate practice and follow-up reflection, not one-time awareness



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