

Thinking Hats © - A Guide

Thinking Hats, developed by the father of lateral thinking, Edward De Bono – constitute one of the most well established cognitive techniques used in business and industry. However, the Hats also provide a useful educational tool for fostering the specific types of thinking needed for both individual and collective success.

The technique is centred on the metaphorical use of six differently coloured hats, with each representing a different type of thinking: white – facts; green – creativity; yellow – benefits; black – cautions; red – feelings; and blue – process.



Collectively the Hats encourage staff and students to look at ideas or topics from a number of distinct points of view. This allows individuals to shift away from any dominant thinking style they may have and gain a more rounded understanding of the issue under discussion. In addition, the Hats also enable a more efficient and constructive use of time during discussions and meetings. With all participants expected to wear the same colour Hat at the same time – that is to say engage in the same type of thinking – unproductive exchanges are minimised.

There is no set order in which the Hats need be used, nor is it necessary for all of them to be used each time they are deployed. The selection of Hats to be used varies according to task to be undertaken. Moreover, no Hat is innately more important than any other. In general, each Hat being used is afforded a similar amount of time during a discussion. The exception to the rule is the red Hat, which, with its focus on feelings and gut reactions, tends to be worn for a shorter period.

The Six Hats – Six Ways of Thinking

The Red Hat – Feelings and Emotions

Use is often limited to just 30 seconds but participants are allowed to express their feelings about the subject under discussion without the need to justify their position.

Example Red Hat Questions:

- How do I feel about this at this moment?
- What is my gut reaction?



The White Hat - Facts and Information

White Hat thinking focusses on identifying what is known about an issue. When information appears to be contradictory both views should be noted. In addition, White Hat thinking looks at what is not known and how gaps in factual knowledge can be addressed.

Examples of White Hat Questions:

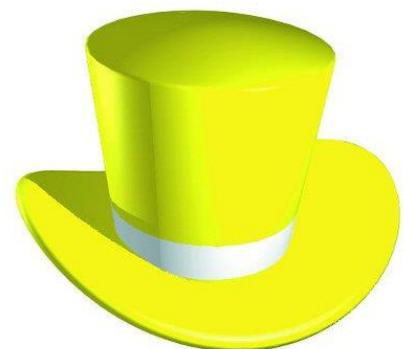
- What information do we have?
- What information do we need that we don't have already?
- Where can we get our missing information from?

The Yellow Hat – Benefits

Yellow Hat thinking identifies the positives of an idea or initiative. An explanation for why a particular benefit might occur should be given. It is often most powerfully used when coupled with Black Hat thinking

Examples of Yellow Hat Questions:

- What benefits will this lead to? Why?
- What are the good things about this? Why?





The Black Hat - Cautions

The Black Hat is used to explore cautions about why something may not work. As such it covers the identification of problems, obstacles and risks. As with the Yellow Hat, Black Hat thinking requires justification otherwise it is akin to Red Hat thinking.

Examples of Black Hat Questions:

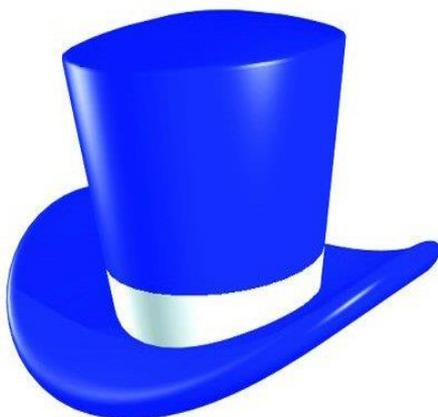
- What are the problems here? Why are they problems?
- What risks might this bring? Why?

The Green Hat - Creativity

The Green Hat approaches the idea under discussion as a starting point for creative thinking. When wearing it people are focussed on searching for new ideas, alternatives and ways of extending the existing suggestion.

Examples of Green Hat Questions:

- Are there alternatives?
- Can we push this further?
- How else could we use this?



The Blue Hat - Organisation

The Blue Hat is concerned with the process of using the Hats and is often but not always used last. When wearing it, an individual might summarise, clarify or categorise the ideas produced, and/or identify next steps.

Examples of Blue Hat Questions:

- What is our key learning point?
- What needs to be done before we next meet?
- Which Hat should we use next?

The Six Hats – Examples of Use

As noted above the selection of Hats utilised, and the order in which they are used, are not fixed but vary according to need. Moreover, use of the Hats is not limited to learning in the classroom and they are utilised across CGSB. For example:

A student is asked to self-assess a piece of their work using the school's WWW/EBI format:

Yellow Hat – What have I done here? (Justify with reference to marking criteria)

Black Hat – What have I not done/not done so well? ((Justify with reference to marking criteria)

Green Hat – Could I have approached the task differently?

Blue Hat – What will I do in the future to enable greater success?

A department is considering whether to change examination boards for A level.

White Hat – What do we know about the syllabus and examination requirements?

Yellow – What are the benefits for our students?

Black Hat – What are the potential risks? Why might this happen?

Blue Hat – What do we need to do by our next meeting to allow us to move forward?

A student has struggled to demonstrate high levels of Behaviour for Learning in a lesson.

White Hat – How did I behave in the lesson? What did I do/not do?

Black Hat – How might my behaviour have impacted upon my learning?

Red Hat – How do I feel about my behaviour now?

Green Hat – How could I have acted differently?

Blue Hat – What do I need to do now to ensure that my learning is not compromised in future?