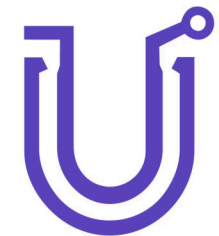


☆ MASTERCLASS 1 · MODULE 1

# How Intelligent People Process Information

**Intellectual Distinction Track —  
Domain: Critical & Analytical Thinking**

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



**U GLOBAL**  
— ACADEMY —



# Why This Session Matters

In school, students are rewarded for answers — recall, speed, meeting expected outcomes. In university and the real world, success demands something harder.

## What School Rewards

*"Know the answer. Be fast. Meet expected outcomes."*

## What the Real World Requires

- Analysing arguments rigorously
- Testing evidence before accepting it
- Thinking with precision
- Defending ideas under challenge

📄 This session builds the foundation of that shift — from **knowing** to **reasoning**.

# How This Session Works

This masterclass is not about learning subjects. It's about learning how to **think across subjects** — a universal cognitive toolkit you carry into every discipline.

1

## Learn a Thinking Model

Understand the framework behind how strong thinkers evaluate arguments across any discipline.

2

## Apply Across Disciplines

Practise the model in literature, history, and economics — where the stakes and complexity feel genuine.

3


## Extract a Universal Tool

Walk away with a concrete, repeatable argument-testing framework you can use in any context.

4

## Build Your Own Work

Integrate each tool into a personalised analytical position — your own evidence-grounded argument.

 **Remember:** Each stage reinforces the last. The model only becomes powerful when you apply it yourself.

# Session Objectives

By the end of this session, students will have moved beyond passive information consumption into structured analytical reasoning. These four outcomes form the foundation of your critical thinking toolkit:



## Distinguish Claim from Evidence

Recognise what is being asserted and what is offered to support it — they are not the same thing.



## Identify Weak Reasoning

Spot logical gaps, unsupported leaps, and the mechanisms that allow flawed arguments to survive scrutiny.



## Evaluate Arguments Critically

Apply a structured process to assess claims with intellectual honesty and rigour.



## Build Defensible Positions

Begin constructing your own evidence-grounded arguments that hold up under challenge.

# The Thinking Gap

## Most Students

*Accept information quickly, rely on confidence of delivery rather than accuracy, and repeat ideas they've encountered.*

## Strong Thinkers

- Pause before accepting a claim
- Question the basis of confidence
- Evaluate before repeating

## Passive Engagement

Receive information as given — prioritise speed and familiarity over scrutiny.

## Active Reasoning

**Pause, question, and evaluate** — understanding the gap is the first step to closing it.



# A Provocation — Class Discussion

## 5-MINUTE OPEN DISCUSSION

Present three claims. Ask students: does this feel convincing? Why?

→ "Social media is destroying teenage mental health."

Hold your instinct. Don't argue the claim yet — ask yourself *why* it feels convincing.

→ "Technology is making students less intelligent."

Hold your instinct. Don't argue the claim yet — ask yourself *why* it feels convincing.

→ "Success at school depends mostly on natural talent."




Hold your instinct. Don't argue the claim yet — ask yourself *why* it feels convincing.

❏ **Instruction to students:** The goal is not to argue the claim — it is to interrogate the source of your own conviction.

# Unpacking the Provocation

## KEY INSIGHT

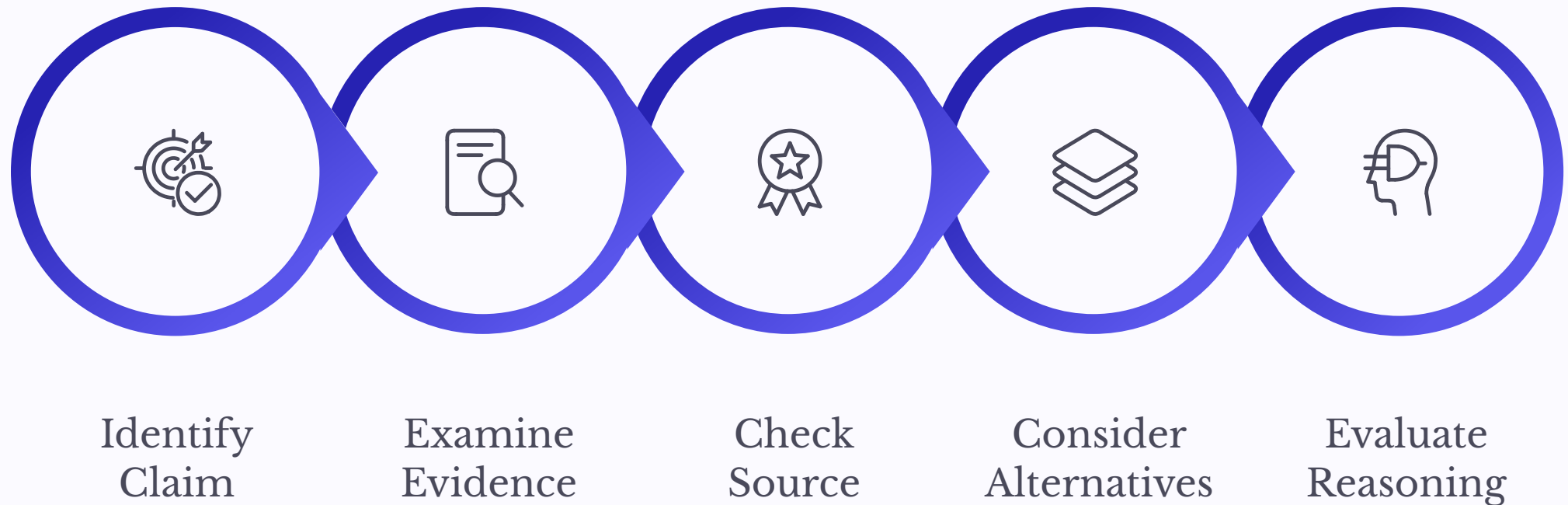
These statements feel convincing — but feeling convinced is not the same as being correct. Three rhetorical techniques are at work in each claim:

-  **Generalisation**  
Broad claims that ignore nuance and sound decisive while sacrificing accuracy. They feel authoritative because they are sweeping — not because they are precise.
-  **Emotional Framing**  
Language designed to trigger concern or pride before evidence is considered. Emotion moves faster than analysis — and often arrives first.
-  **Familiar Narratives**  
Claims that echo widely-held assumptions feel true because we've heard them — not because they've been verified. Repetition creates the illusion of evidence.

 **Key Insight:** Convincing does not mean correct.

# Introducing the Five-Step Thinking Model

Strong thinkers don't react — they apply a structured process of evaluation. This five-step model forms the foundation of academic judgement and applies to any argument in any discipline:



A decision about any argument that skips even one of these steps produces a conclusion that cannot withstand scrutiny. The model is designed to make rigorous thinking repeatable — not just aspirational.

# Applying the Model — Literature (Macbeth)

## SCENARIO

### The Claim

*"Macbeth is purely ambitious."*

One of the most repeated student interpretations — but does the text support it without qualification?

### Applying the Model

- What evidence supports ambition as his **dominant** motivation?
- Which moments reveal guilt, fear, or reluctance?
- Could manipulation, masculinity, or psychological fragility be equally supported by the text?

📄 **Insight:** Interpretation must always be tested against evidence — not assumed from reputation.



# Applying the Model — History (The Fall of Rome)

## SCENARIO

Claim: *"The Roman Empire collapsed due to moral decline."* A persistent narrative — but does it hold under scrutiny? Four competing explanations must be weighed:

### Moral Decline

Compelling as a narrative — but is it supported by the strongest evidence, or does it appeal because it is morally satisfying?

### Military Overstretch

A structural explanation — not a moral one. The empire's borders became impossible to defend with available resources.

### Economic Pressures

Inflation, trade disruption, and taxation collapse created systemic instability that no leadership could fully reverse.

### External Pressures

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.

# Applying the Model — Economics (Minimum Wage)

## SCENARIO

Claim: "*Minimum wage increases unemployment.*" A staple of introductory economics — but far more contested than it appears.

### What Does the Data Say?

Card & Krueger's landmark research found negligible or no effect. Other studies show modest losses in certain sectors. The evidence is genuinely mixed.

### Does Context Matter?

Outcomes differ sharply between high-cost urban markets and low-wage rural economies. The same policy produces different results in different environments.

### What Other Variables Exist?

Automation, consumer demand, sector type, and employer size all affect outcomes independently — and are often absent from simplified claims.

📌 **Insight:** A claim that is true in one environment may be false — or reversed — in another.

# The Argument Test — Universal Tool

## CORE TOOL

Extracted from every discipline examined: apply this to any argument — academic, journalistic, political, or personal. If any one of these three elements fails, the argument weakens — regardless of how confidently it is delivered.

1

### Claim

What is being argued? Is it clearly stated — or buried in vague language that resists scrutiny?

2

### Evidence

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

3

### Reasoning

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

- ❑ **Important:** The Argument Test does not produce a perfect verdict. It produces a **rigorous, accountable evaluation** — which is what real analytical thinking requires.

# Level 1 vs Level 4 Thinking

## PERFORMANCE LEVELS

The difference between weak and strong academic thinking is not intelligence — it is **precision**. This upgrade is available to any student willing to apply the discipline.

### Level 1 Response

*"Homework should be banned."* An opinion stated as a conclusion. No evidence, no reasoning, no acknowledgement of complexity. Cannot be defended under challenge.

### Level 4 Response

*"Research suggests that excessive homework reduces sleep and sustained attention, which may negatively impact academic performance — particularly in secondary school students."* Evidence grounds the claim. Reasoning connects cause to effect. Precision qualifies the scope appropriately.

### Specificity

Name the research, the mechanism, and the affected group — not just the conclusion.

### Causal Reasoning

Connect evidence to outcome — show the logical chain, not just the association.

### Appropriate Scope

Qualify claims to the evidence available — avoid overstating what the data supports.

# Why Do Weak Arguments Survive?

If the Argument Test is straightforward, why do poorly constructed arguments persist — and often succeed? Four mechanisms allow weak reasoning to accumulate authority:



## Emotional Appeal

Fear, pride, or moral outrage bypasses rational evaluation — emotion moves people faster than evidence and often arrives before analysis begins.



## Confirmation Bias

People favour information that aligns with existing beliefs and resist evidence that challenges them — even when that evidence is stronger.



## Lack of Challenge

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



## Repetition

Repeated exposure increases perceived credibility — regardless of the quality of evidence behind the claim.

**Discussion Prompt:** Is it harder to question ideas you already believe — or ideas you've never encountered before?

# Activity Instructions — Guided Task

## APPLIED TASK

Students will now apply the Argument Test to the claim provided by your instructor. This is not a knowledge test — it is a **structured thinking rehearsal**. Individual or pair work — 8 minutes, then 5 minutes class sharing.

1

### Identify the Claim

State precisely what the argument is asserting. Precision matters — strip away the language and find the core proposition.

2

### Assess the Evidence

Is it specific and credible — or general and anecdotal?  
What is offered to support the claim, and is it sufficient?

3

### Evaluate the Reasoning

Where does the logic hold — and where does it strain?  
Identify any leaps, gaps, or unstated assumptions.

4

### Identify What Is Missing

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

- ❏ After completing the task, reflect: **Did your instinct and your structured analysis lead to the same conclusion — or a different one?**

# Class Debrief — Sharing Analyses

## 5-MINUTE FACILITATED DISCUSSION

Invite 2–3 students or pairs to share their analyses. The goal is not consensus — it is rigorous disagreement grounded in evidence.

### → Did Different Students Reach Different Conclusions?

If so — why? What evidence or reasoning led to divergent outcomes? Explore the source of disagreement rather than resolving it too quickly.

### → What Evidence Proved Hardest to Evaluate?

Which part of the claim resisted clear analysis — and what made it difficult to assess with confidence?

### → Where Did the Reasoning Break Down?

Identify the specific point at which the argument's logic strained — not just that it failed, but precisely where and why.

📌 **Reinforce:** Disagreement grounded in evidence is the goal — not consensus.

# Thinking Traps — Common Errors to Avoid

## KEY INSIGHT

Now that students have practised, surface the most common analytical errors. Being aware of these traps is the first step to avoiding them.



### False Certainty

Treating a claim as proven when evidence is limited or contested. Confidence is not the same as correctness.



### Cherry-Picking

Selecting only evidence that supports a position and ignoring contradictions — producing a partial picture presented as a complete one.



### Correlation vs Causation

Assuming that because two things co-occur, one must cause the other. Relationship is not the same as mechanism.



### Appeal to Authority

Treating a source's credentials as sufficient evidence — regardless of the quality of what they've actually argued.

# From Analysis to Argument — The Transition

Critical thinking is not just about testing other people's arguments. The real test is whether you can **build your own** — grounded in evidence, honest about its limits, and defensible under challenge.

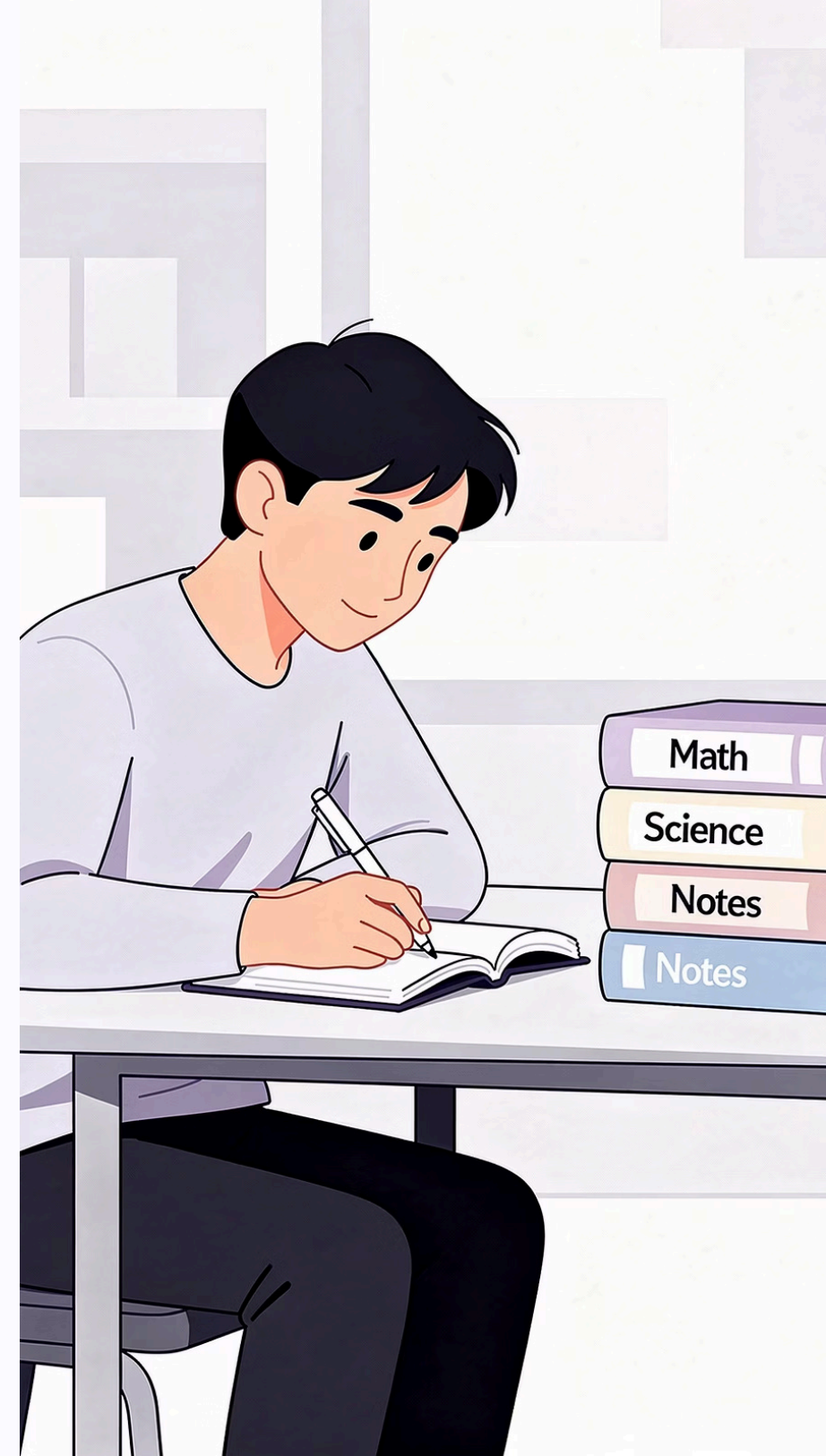
## What Analysis Does

Tests the arguments of others — identifying claims, evaluating evidence, and exposing weak reasoning.

## What Argument-Building Requires

- A clear, defensible claim of your own
- Specific evidence that supports it
- Transparent reasoning connecting the two

□ The same three elements apply to building as to testing: **Claim → Evidence → Reasoning.**



# Artefact 1 — Analytical Position Paper

## ARTEFACT BUILD

Your first formal output from the Intellectual Distinction Track. Not a summary — a **structured analytical position**. 150–200 words, written with precision and academic register.

01

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### Central Question

Genuinely debatable — not a factual question with a simple answer. The question must open real intellectual space.

03

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### Two Evidence Sources

Specific, relevant, and credible — not general or anecdotal. Name the evidence and explain why it supports your claim.

02

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### Initial Position

Your argument, clearly stated and defensible under scrutiny. Not a hedge — a committed intellectual position.

04

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### One Counterargument

Acknowledge the strongest objection honestly. Engaging with opposition strengthens your argument — it does not weaken it.

- ❏ **Expected Output:** A clear, precise analytical position — written in academic register, grounded in specific evidence, honest about its limits.

# Reflection — What Makes an Argument Trustworthy?

## CONSOLIDATION

Consider the central question of this session: *What makes an argument trustworthy rather than merely persuasive?*

### Persuasion

Can be achieved through emotion, repetition, and framing alone. It operates by exploiting the gap between feeling and thinking.

### Trust

Must be earned through evidence, logic, and intellectual honesty. It is the product of rigour — not performance.

### Persuasion Without Trust

Feels convincing in the moment — but collapses when challenged by someone who applies the Argument Test.

### Trust Built on Rigour

Survives scrutiny because it is grounded in evidence, honest about limits, and transparent in its reasoning.

**Task:** Take 2 minutes to write one sentence that answers this question in your own words.

# Extension Task — Independent Application

## EXTENSION

Take the Argument Test beyond the classroom and apply it independently to a real-world source. Build the habit of rigorous evaluation so that it becomes available under real pressure.

### Find an Article

From a newspaper, website, or academic source. Choose something genuinely substantive — not a simple opinion piece.

1

2

### Identify the Central Claim

Strip away the language. What is the argument actually asserting? State it in one precise sentence.

3

### Locate the Evidence Offered

What does the author use to support the claim? Is it specific, credible, and sufficient?

4

### Find One Logical Flaw, Assumption, or Gap

Identify the specific point where the reasoning weakens. Bring your analysis to the next session — be prepared to defend your evaluation.

☐ Analytical judgement is not a talent. It is a **trained habit** — and every argument you encounter is an opportunity to practise it.

# Key Takeaways — What You Now Know

## MASTERCLASS 1 CLOSE

Feeling convinced is not the same as being correct.

Rhetorical techniques — generalisation, emotional framing, familiar narratives — produce conviction without requiring evidence.

Every argument can be tested: Claim → Evidence → Reasoning.

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

Weak arguments survive through emotion, bias, repetition, and lack of challenge.

Understanding these mechanisms is the first step to not being moved by them.

Precision separates Level 1 thinking from Level 4 thinking.

The upgrade is not about intelligence — it is about discipline, specificity, and honest reasoning.

Strong thinkers build arguments — not just critique them.

The real test is whether you can construct a defensible position of your own.



# Session Close — What's Next

Complete your Analytical Position Paper before the next class. Come prepared to defend your position under challenge.

## Next Session

We move from evaluating arguments to **constructing them under pressure**. You will apply the Argument Test to live debates and defend positions you may not personally hold.

## What to Develop

The intellectual flexibility that distinguishes exceptional thinkers — the ability to argue rigorously for positions beyond your own instinctive view.

## Before Next Class

Complete your Analytical Position Paper. Apply the Extension Task independently. Bring your article analysis ready to defend.

# The Shift from Knowing to Reasoning

Before exploring how intelligent people process information, it is worth pausing on the central challenge this session addresses: the gap between accumulating knowledge and using it well.

## Knowledge Without Reasoning

A student who knows many facts but cannot evaluate them is no more analytically equipped than one who knows fewer — and may be more susceptible to confident misinformation.

## Reasoning as the Foundation

The ability to test, evaluate, and construct arguments is the foundation of every discipline — and the skill most consistently under-taught in formal education.

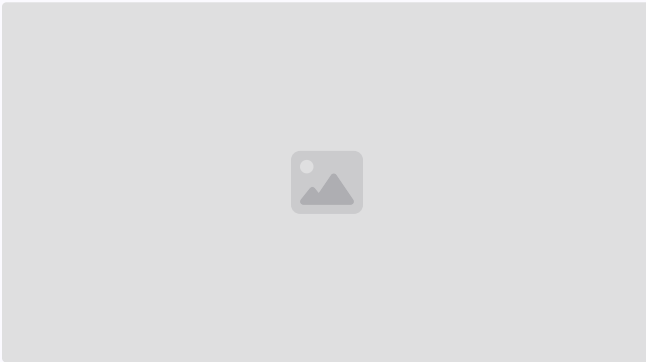
## What This Track Builds

A universal cognitive toolkit: repeatable processes for evaluating claims and building defensible positions across any subject or context.

- ❏ **Core Question for this session:** Why do intelligent people still arrive at weak conclusions — and what separates those who don't?

# What the Gap Actually Looks Like

The thinking gap is not a gap in knowledge — it is a gap in **process**. It shows up not in what people know, but in how they handle what they don't know.



The gap is not fixed. It is a skill — and like any skill, it responds to deliberate practice. This session is the beginning of that practice.

# Why a Model Matters

Intuition is fast — but unreliable under pressure. A structured model slows thinking down enough to catch the errors that intuition misses. It makes rigorous thinking **repeatable**, not just occasional.

## Without a Model

Thinkers rely on familiarity, confidence, and emotional resonance — all of which can be manipulated independently of evidence.



## With a Model

Each step of evaluation is named and sequenced — making it harder to skip the stages where weak arguments are most likely to slip through unchallenged.

The five-step model does not replace intelligence — it **organises** it. The goal is not to think more slowly, but to think more deliberately.

# Practice Makes Analytical Precision Permanent

The Argument Test becomes available under real pressure only when it has been practised enough to become habitual. This section is the beginning of that habituation.

## Why Practice Matters

Reading about analytical frameworks produces recognition — not competence. The ability to apply the Argument Test under pressure requires repeated execution, not passive familiarity.

## What Good Practice Looks Like

Committing to a position before evaluating it. Being honest about where your reasoning strains. Naming what is missing — not only what is present.

## The Debrief as Learning

Hearing how others applied the same framework — and reached different conclusions — is itself a powerful analytical exercise. Disagreement grounded in evidence is the goal.

📌 **Remember:** The goal of guided practice is not the right answer. It is the **right process** — applied consistently enough to become second nature.

# What Intellectual Distinction Actually Looks Like

The final measure of this session is not what you now know about analytical thinking — it is whether you can **do** it. Intellectual distinction is demonstrated in output, not understanding.

1

## Level 1

Restate a claim heard elsewhere with confidence.

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2

## Level 2

Identify that a claim requires evidence.

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3

## Level 3

Apply the Argument Test to evaluate a claim systematically.

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4

## Level 4

Construct and defend a rigorous analytical position of your own — grounded in specific evidence, honest about counterarguments, and precise in its scope.

The Analytical Position Paper is not a summary of this session. It is the first demonstration of what you are capable of when you think well.