

ABSTRACTION LADDER

WORKSHEET

Purpose: Think at different levels of detail.

1. Start with a specific problem.
2. Move up levels of abstraction (Why does this matter?).
3. Move down (What specific actions can be taken?).

The problem/decision/choice/action:

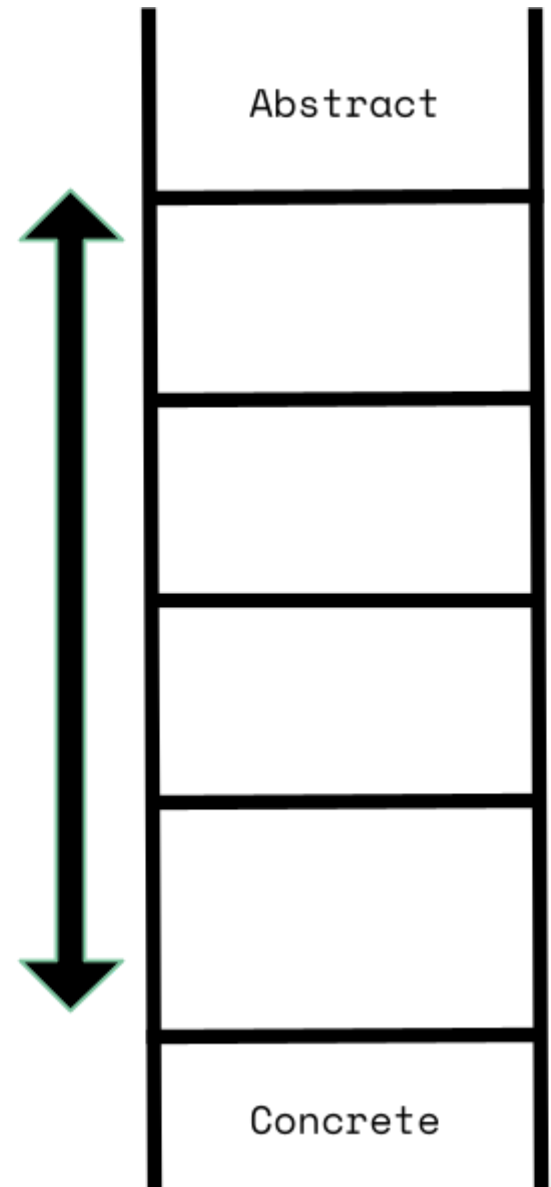
Why does this matter? The big picture.

Are there any broad principles?

What specific actions can be taken?

Is there any specific data?

How can you put this into action?



HOW TO USE (PRO TIPS)

Create a Visual Ladder:

- Draw a ladder or staircase with each step representing a level of abstraction. Label the bottom with concrete details and the top with abstract concepts. This visualization can help pinpoint where clarity is needed.

Oscillate Between Levels:

- Deliberately shift between high-level strategic thinking and low-level tactical details.
 - ◆ For example, start by stating the big picture, then drill down to the immediate next step, and alternate to maintain a balanced perspective.

Identify Underlying Assumptions:

- Use laddering to expose assumptions hidden in everyday language.
- Ask “why” repeatedly until you reach the most abstract rationale behind an idea or problem.

Apply to Communication:

- Use abstraction laddering to tailor messages for different audiences.
- For technical teams, descend to detailed steps; for executives, ascend to the core vision or outcome.

Define the Problem at Multiple Levels:

- Begin by writing a broad problem statement, then create sub-statements that break it down into specific components.
- This practice ensures that no essential detail is overlooked while keeping sight of the overall objective.

Regularly Reassess:



→ In dynamic projects, revisit your ladder to see if your assumptions still hold or if new details have emerged.

◆ Adjust your steps up or down accordingly.

Combine with Other Models:

→ Integrate abstraction laddering with other tools.

◆ For instance, after mapping out a decision tree, use laddering to see if the underlying logic behind the branches remains consistent when viewed from a higher level.

Practice Makes Perfect:

→ Regularly practicing abstraction laddering, such as during brainstorming sessions or after-action reviews, can sharpen the ability to switch perspectives quickly. Over time, this skill becomes second nature.



QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

Moving Between Details and Big Ideas:

- What are the concrete details or specific examples that illustrate the problem or opportunity you're facing?
- Looking at the issue broadly, what are the underlying principles, values, or long-term goals that connect to this challenge?

Questioning Underlying Assumptions:

- What assumptions are you making at the detailed level that might differ when viewed from a higher perspective?
- How might your perspective change if you shifted from the minutiae (e.g., daily expenses, minute-by-minute scheduling) to the overarching strategy (e.g., financial independence, life balance)?

Connecting Levels of Understanding:

- How does this specific challenge reflect broader trends or patterns in your life or work?
 - What insights do you gain by contrasting the detailed (micro) and the conceptual (macro) views of this issue?
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DIVIDE AND CONQUER

WORKSHEET

Purpose: Break complex problems into smaller, manageable parts.

1. **Main Problem:** Define the challenge/action/decision.
2. Break into **key sub-problems**.
3. Divide each sub-problem into **action steps**.
4. **Execute** one step at a time.

Main Problem	Sub-Problem	Sub-Problem	Sub-Problem	Action Step



HOW TO USE (PRO TIPS)

Break a Problem Down Until It's Easy:

- If a task feels overwhelming, it's not divided enough.
- Keep breaking it down until the next step feels obvious.

Use the "Recursive 3-Step Breakdown":

- Step 1: What's the big problem?
- Step 2: Split it into three smaller subproblems.
- Step 3: For each subproblem, repeat until manageable.

Apply the "Lego Block" Strategy:

- Complex projects become modular when broken into independent parts (like a Lego set).
- **Example:** Instead of "Write a book," break it down into "Outline → Research → Draft → Edit → Publish." And break down each of the steps as well.

Prioritize: Solve the Hardest or the Easiest First?

- **Hardest First:** Clears major roadblocks early.
- **Easiest First:** Builds momentum and reduces mental resistance.

Use for Mental Clarity:

- If overwhelmed, write down everything on your mind and break it into smaller, solvable parts.

Pro Tip:

- If stuck, ask: "What's the smallest step I can take right now?"
 - If a problem seems impossible, you haven't divided it enough.
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QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

Problem Breakdown:

- What is the overarching challenge, and what are its main components or sub-problems?
- Which parts of the problem seem the most complex, and which are simpler to address?

Prioritizing Sub-Problems:

- What is the logical order in which the sub-problems should be tackled? (Consider dependencies and urgency.)
- Which sub-task will have the greatest impact on progressing toward your overall goal?

Resource and Skill Allocation:

- What resources (time, money, skills) are required for each identified sub-problem?
- How can you assign tasks (to yourself or your team) based on each person's strengths?

Success Metrics:

- How will solving each sub-problem contribute to solving the larger challenge?
 - What milestones or indicators will tell you that a particular segment has been successfully resolved?
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FEYNMAN TECHNIQUE

WORKSHEET

Purpose: Master complex concepts by simplifying them.

1. Write a basic explanation of the concept.
2. Where do you struggle? What confuses you?
3. Refine your explanation in simpler terms.
4. Reassess: What still needs work?
5. Learn and repeat the loop.

Explain the concept in your words:	Identify gaps in understanding:	Simplify like explaining to a toddler:	Review what knowledge you are missing:

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HOW TO USE (PRO TIPS)

Force Simplicity:

- After researching your topic, write an explanation in plain language as if you were teaching an eight-year-old.
- Use simple analogies, diagrams, or sketches to bridge gaps between complex ideas and everyday concepts.
- Review your explanation and ask yourself, “Would someone with no background understand this?”

Identify Knowledge Gaps:

- When you struggle to explain a part, mark it. Then, revisit your source material for clarification.
- Keep a running list of “I don’t get this”. Address them one by one to ensure a complete grasp of the subject.

Teach and Iterate:

- Explain the concept to a peer or record a video of your explanation; feedback can reveal hidden misunderstandings.
- Revise your notes and explanation until you can teach the concept confidently.

Mix Modalities:

- Combine written, verbal, and visual explanations.
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QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

Balancing Simplicity and Depth:

- Which parts of the concept you're trying to master are most resistant to simplification, and why do you think these complexities exist?
- Reflect on a moment when your simplified explanation uncovered gaps in your understanding. How does this tension between simplicity and complexity reveal deeper layers of the subject?

Personal and Professional Stakes:

- How would misinterpreting or oversimplifying this concept affect your long-term decision-making—be it in managing finances, leading a project, or guiding your team?
- What real-world challenges or failures might occur if you fail to fully internalize and accurately teach this concept?

Iterative Refinement Through Teaching:

- How can you leverage teaching (to peers, a mentor, or even a simulated audience) as a tool to expose hidden assumptions in your own understanding?
 - What unexpected questions did your audience ask, and what do these reveal about the limitations or blind spots in your explanation?
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IMPACT EFFORT MATRIX

WORKSHEET

Purpose: Prioritize tasks based on effort vs. impact.

1. List all tasks/projects.
2. Plot them in the matrix.
3. Decide what to focus on first.

My tasks/projects:

High-Impact Low-Effort (Do)

High-Impact High-Effort (Decide)

Low-Impact Low-Effort (Delegate)

Low-Impact High-Effort (Delete)



HOW TO USE (PRO TIPS)

Avoid the "High-Effort, Low-Impact" Trap:

- Many people over-focus on tasks that feel important but don't move the needle.
- Before committing to work, ask: "Is this truly necessary?"

Prioritize "Quick Wins" and "Strategic Bets":

- **Quick Wins:** Low-effort, high-impact tasks (immediate results).
- **Strategic Bets:** High-effort, high-impact tasks (long-term gains).

Set an "Effort Budget":

- If a task is high-effort, ask, "How can I reduce the effort without sacrificing impact?"
- Can you delegate, automate, or simplify it?

Reverse Engineer Big Goals:

- If something seems high-effort, break it down into smaller, manageable low-effort steps.

Pro Tip:

- Before starting a task, plot it on the Impact-Effort Matrix.
 - If something is low-impact AND high-effort, eliminate it immediately.
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QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

Beyond Quantification:

- How do you define “impact” in qualitative terms—such as emotional, strategic, or long-term benefits—beyond immediate measurable outcomes?
- Reflect on a task that seemed low-effort yet yielded surprisingly transformative results. What factors contributed to that success?

Uncovering Hidden Opportunities:

- Are there tasks you initially dismissed as high effort that might be broken down further to reveal a high-impact core?
- How might personal biases in estimating effort or impact be skewing your prioritization, and what objective data can help recalibrate your judgments?

Strategic Resource Allocation:

- In what ways can you reassign resources from tasks that are “effort sinks” to those with exponential returns, even if they seem less obvious at first glance?
 - How can you build in flexibility to reassess tasks as conditions evolve, ensuring that your matrix remains dynamic and reflective of real-world shifts?
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SPACED REPETITION WORKSHEET

Purpose: Improve long-term retention through strategic review timing.

1. What are you learning?
2. Create a spaced repetition schedule.
3. Track and rate each review session. (1-10)

Subject	Day 1	Day 3	Day 7	Day 14	Day 30



HOW TO USE (PRO TIPS)

Customize Your Intervals:

- Use software (like Anki or RemNote) to adjust intervals based on your performance; harder items should come up more frequently.
- Track your “forgetting curve” and adjust the repetition schedule accordingly.

Active Recall Integration:

- Pair spaced repetition with active recall—don’t just re-read flashcards, force yourself to generate answers before checking them.
- Consider using different formats (text, images, audio) for the same item to reinforce memory through varied contexts.

Regular Reviews and Feedback:

- Periodically challenge yourself with cumulative reviews (e.g. tests, quizzes) to ensure long-term retention, not just short-term memorization.

Combine with Other Techniques:

- Mix in interleaving and varied practice sessions to strengthen understanding.
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QUESTIONS TO REFLECT ON

Learning Efficiency:

- Which concepts or skills have you struggled to retain over time, and how can spaced repetition be tailored to reinforce these areas more effectively?
- How do you determine the ideal interval for reviewing a particular piece of information, considering both the complexity of the subject and your personal memory patterns?

Integration with Active Recall:

- How can you incorporate testing and self-quizzing into your spaced repetition schedule to boost long-term retention?
- What adjustments might you make to your review intervals based on performance metrics or moments of insight?

Real-World Application:

- How could you apply spaced repetition techniques to non-academic areas (e.g., learning new financial models, memorizing key business metrics, or developing a new habit)?
 - Reflect on a recent learning experience: how would a structured spaced repetition plan have changed your outcome?
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