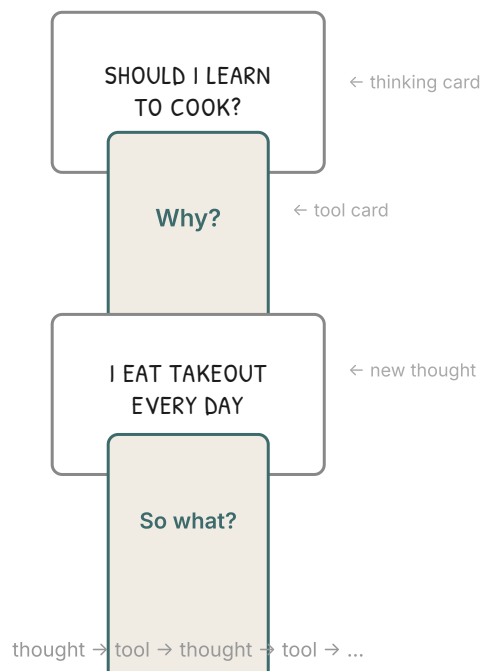


Chain of Thought

A thinking method with paper cards



This guide teaches you a simple method for structured thinking using paper cards and a flat surface. In 10 minutes you'll have everything you need to start exploring any question, decision, or idea — one thought at a time.

The Method

Chain of thought is a way of exploring ideas by writing one thought at a time, then using a *thinking tool* to prompt the next. You build a branching tree of connected ideas on your table.

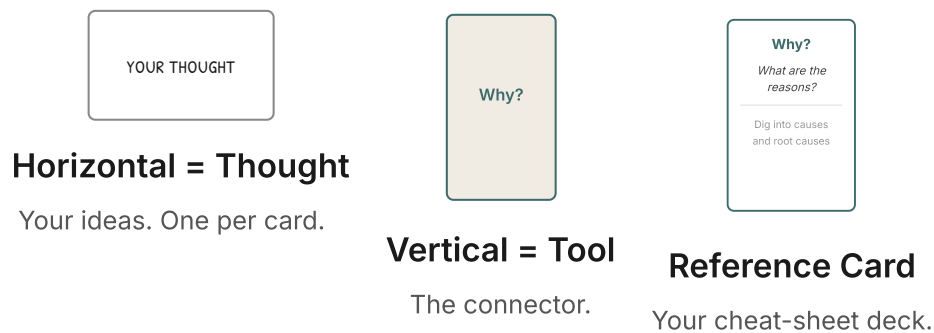
What you need

☐ Cards (6.8 × 4 cm) ↓ A pen ☐ A flat surface

📄 Reference cards (cut from last pages)

Three types of cards

Thought and tool cards are the same size — just rotated. Reference cards are larger:



How to play

- 1 **Write your starting thought** on a card. Place it horizontally.
- 2 **Pick a thinking tool.** Write the tool name on a new card and place it *vertically below your thought*, overlapping the bottom edge.
- 3 **Pause and reflect** on the combination of your thought and the tool's question.
- 4 **Write your answer** on a new card. Place it *horizontally over the bottom of the tool card*, so the tool name peeks out above.
- 5 **Repeat.** Fan 2–4 tool cards out from one thought to branch. The table is your constraint — and that's a feature.

Example: Exploring a Decision

Here's how a chain grows on your table, step by step.

1. Start with what's on your mind.



One thought, placed horizontally. Don't overthink it.

2. Pick a tool. Place it vertically below, overlapping.



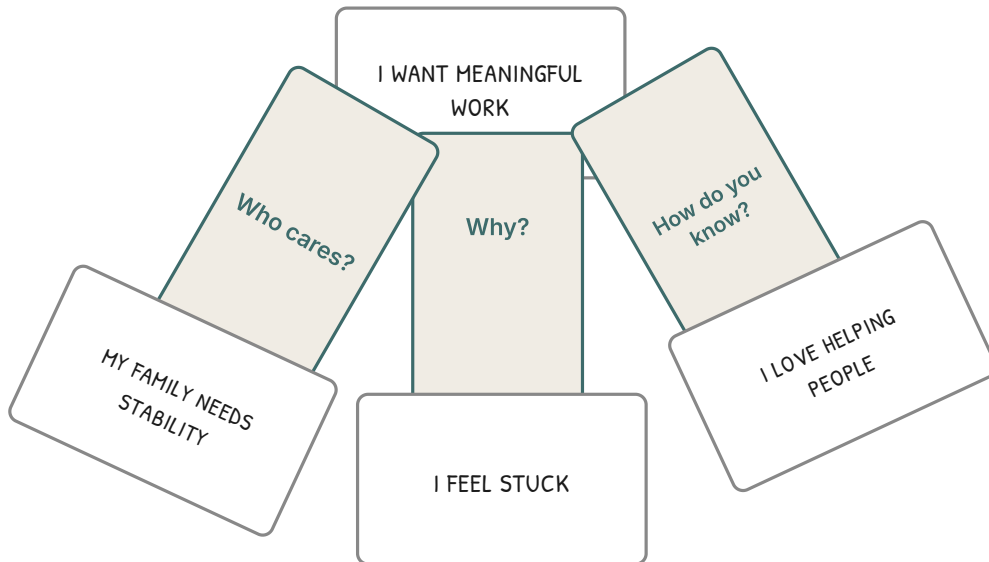
The tool card tucks under the thought. Pause — ask yourself: "What am I actually trying to achieve?"

3. Write your answer. Place it over the tool card's bottom.



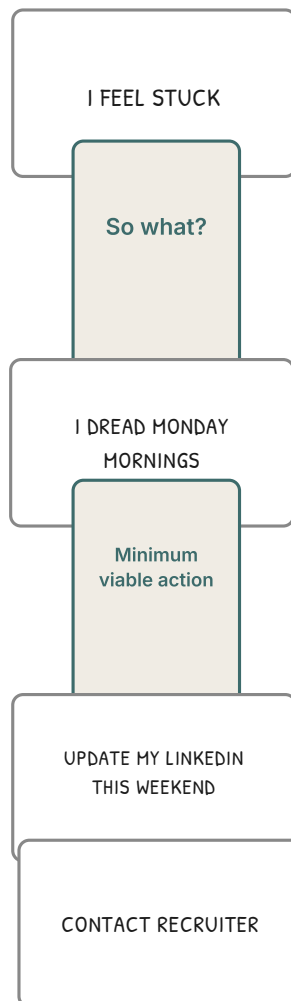
The tool name peeks out between the two thoughts — showing what connects them.

4. Branch out — fan multiple tools from one thought.



Three tools fan out from one thought — three new directions to explore. The physical space on your table limits branching to 2–4. That's a feature.

5. Keep going — stack cards to follow one path deeper.



A single path going deeper: feeling → consequence → smallest action. The best chains end with something you can do today.

Your Thinking Tools

These cover the full arc of thinking: from understanding a problem to taking your first step. You don't need to use them in order — pick whatever feels right.

CLARIFY

What is the goal? *"What am I actually trying to achieve?"*

UNDERSTAND

Why? *"What are the reasons behind this?"*

How do you know? *"What evidence do you have? How can you be sure?"*

CHALLENGE

Really? *"Is that actually the case? Test it."*

EVALUATE

Pros *"What are the benefits?"*

Cons *"What are the disadvantages?"*

Worst case? *"What is the worst realistic outcome?"*

IMAGINE

What if? *"Create a scenario. What would happen if...?"*

FEEL

How does it feel? *"How does this make you feel?"*

CONSEQUENCES

So what? *"What are the consequences of this?"*

Then what? *"What happens next?"*

PEOPLE

Who cares? *"Who is affected? Who is involved?"*

Who do you trust? *"Who knows this, has done this, can help?"*

SHARPEN

Be specific! *"What exactly do you mean? Give an example."*

OPTIONS

Alternatives? *"What other options are there?"*

ACT

How? *"How will you make it happen?"*

Minimum viable action *"What is the smallest step you can take right now?"*

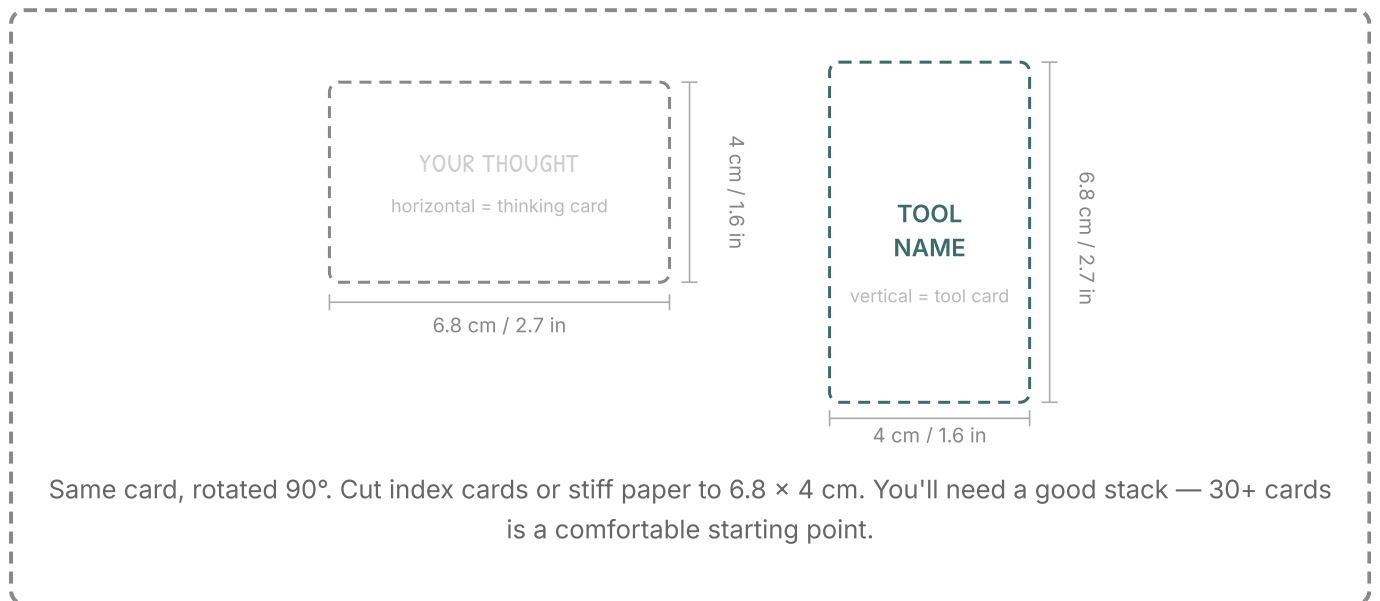
These tools are enough to get started. There are many more thinking tools you can use with the method - [explore them all at hmmm.app/tools](https://hmmm.app/tools)

Tips

- **One thought per card.** If your answer contains two ideas, split them into two cards.
- **No wrong answers.** Write what comes to mind. You can always branch differently.
- **Draw randomly** from your reference deck when you're stuck. Let the tool surprise you.
- **Stop when you have an action.** The best chains end with something you can do today.

Card Template

All cards are the same size. The orientation tells you the role: **horizontal = thought, vertical = tool.**



Getting started quickly

- Cut a stack of blank cards to size. They'll serve as both thought and tool cards.
- Cut out the reference cards on the next pages — that's your tool deck.
- Pick something that's on your mind. Write it on a card. Place it horizontally.
- Draw a reference card, read the question, and see what thought it provokes.

Cut-Out: Tool Reference Cards

Cut along the dashed lines. Use as a deck — browse for the right tool, or draw randomly.

<p>What is the goal? <i>What are you trying to achieve?</i> <i>What is the purpose?</i></p> <p>Clarify before you explore. See the bigger picture behind your thoughts.</p>	<p>Why? <i>Why are you thinking or feeling this?</i> <i>What caused this?</i> <i>What happened that led here?</i></p> <p>Dig into causes and root causes.</p>	<p>How do you know? <i>What makes you sure this is true?</i> <i>What evidence do you have?</i> <i>What proof do you have?</i></p> <p>See the difference between facts and opinions.</p>
<p>Really? <i>Are you sure this is true?</i> <i>Is this really the case?</i> <i>How much would you bet on being right?</i></p> <p>Challenge your assumptions. Test your certainty.</p>	<p>So what? <i>What are the consequences?</i> <i>What happens if I do this?</i> <i>What happens if I don't?</i></p> <p>Trace implications forward. Why does this matter?</p>	<p>Then what? <i>What will happen next?</i> <i>What is the next step?</i> <i>What will others do in response?</i></p> <p>See the future. Plan ahead.</p>
<p>Who cares? <i>Who is affected by this?</i> <i>Who is involved?</i> <i>Who is responsible?</i></p> <p>Map the people and their stakes.</p>	<p>Alternatives? <i>What else could I do?</i> <i>What other options do I have?</i> <i>What actions can I take here?</i></p> <p>Try to come up with at least 3 alternatives.</p>	<p>How? <i>How will you make this happen?</i> <i>What are the steps needed?</i> <i>What is the plan?</i></p> <p>Turn thoughts into concrete actions.</p>

Cut-Out: Tool Reference Cards (continued)

More tools to round out your deck - and feel free to create your own tools.

<p>Minimum viable action</p> <p><i>What is the smallest step I could take today?</i></p> <p><i>What takes less than 10 minutes?</i></p> <p><i>What would I do if I only had to do 1%?</i></p> <p>If it feels hard, make it smaller. Start moving.</p>	<p>Pros</p> <p><i>What are the benefits?</i></p> <p><i>What do you gain?</i></p> <p><i>What makes this a good idea?</i></p> <p>List the advantages. Be thorough.</p>	<p>Cons</p> <p><i>What are the disadvantages?</i></p> <p><i>What do you lose?</i></p> <p><i>What could go wrong?</i></p> <p>List the downsides. Be honest.</p>
<p>Worst case?</p> <p><i>What is the worst realistic outcome?</i></p> <p><i>Could you live with that?</i></p> <p><i>How likely is it, really?</i></p> <p>Pre-mortem thinking. Often less scary than you think.</p>	<p>What if?</p> <p><i>What would happen if...?</i></p> <p><i>Imagine a different scenario.</i></p> <p><i>What if the opposite were true?</i></p> <p>Hypothetical thinking. Explore possibilities.</p>	<p>How does it feel?</p> <p><i>How does this make you feel?</i></p> <p><i>What does your gut say?</i></p> <p><i>What emotions come up?</i></p> <p>Access your intuition. Feelings are data too.</p>
<p>Who do you trust?</p> <p><i>Who knows this? Who has done this?</i></p> <p><i>Who can help?</i></p> <p><i>Whose opinion do you value?</i></p> <p>Identify authorities, mentors, and support.</p>	<p>Be specific!</p> <p><i>What exactly do you mean?</i></p> <p><i>Can you give an example?</i></p> <p><i>What does this look like in practice?</i></p> <p>Move from abstract to concrete. Precision reveals clarity.</p>	

Take your chains digital — save, continue, and share your thinking sessions.

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