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Smart Buying If a single share of a pricey stock seems out of reach, programs from Schwab, Fidelity and Robinhood can get you access to just a slice. By Anne Kates Smith • Published 9 September 22 If you're reading this and you don't think you're smart, I definitely want you to reframe how you're thinking about intelligence. Being smart is about much more than acing an IQ test or being the valedictorian. Those are both great things, but they have more to do with being book smart. In our modern society, it's arguably more important to know how to think smart (to know how to critically think about things and be open to new ideas). Here're 9 strategies for how to think smart: 1. Be Open to Different Perspectives Thinking smart means being open to new ideas. When we hold on too dearly to what we currently think, we are actually closing ourselves off to new ideas. And thinking smart is all about considering, evaluating, and analyzing new ideas. For example, when I was in fifth grade, I wrote a journal entry about how amazing President George H. W. Bush was. I didn't write it because I had critically thought about politics. I wrote it because my dad really liked George H. W. Bush. Therefore, I did too. If I had known how to think smart as a fifth grader, I might be more inclined to consider the pros and cons of both parties. Be very suspicious of an argument that only considers one side of an argument and doesn't consider any negative points of that side. That is the opposite of thinking smart. 2. Seriously Consider the Counterargument It's not enough to just be open to both sides of an argument; real critical thinking requires you to dig deeply into the other side. I might have a hunch that Chinese herbs will be good for my winter cough, but I'm not thinking smart until I do extensive research that doesn't just confirm my initial bias. I need to find reputable sources (think academic journals and peer-reviewed studies) that pertain to my topic: Chinese medicine and cough. I can't cherry pick and only include the ones that say Chinese herbs will help my cough. I have to read and seriously consider the other side. I have to be genuinely open to being wrong. ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ That's a tough pill for a lot of people to swallow. When we only look at evidence that proves what we already think, that's called a confirmation bias. It's a great way to feel confident that you're always right, but it's a terrible way to learn anything new. So if you want to start thinking smart, avoid confirmation bias and be truly open to the counterargument and to being wrong. 3. Ask Questions and Listen to the Answers Thinking smart also means being curious. Smart people are inquisitive about how the world works, what makes people tick, and what it all means. So another trick for how to think smart is to ask lots of questions. Surround yourself with people you think are intelligent. Again, avoid confirmation bias here too. If you only surround yourself with smart people who think just like you, you're not going to learn much. My college experience was great because I didn't go to a school where everyone was liberal or conservative. There was a big mix of perspectives, and this deepened our classroom discussions and thinking. Once you have your smart people crew, you need to ask questions. Keep a list of things you're genuinely curious about. For example, I'm curious about parenting, politics, education, creativity, psychology, healthcare, other cultures, religion, philosophy... The list goes on. But don't fake the funk; if you're asking questions just to ask them, you're not going to learn much. You need to be genuinely interested in the answers. Learn how to ask questions skillfully. How to Be Amazingly Good at Asking Questions Then, the second step is to really listen to the answer. Don't just listen in order to respond. Listen to hear the other person. Don't listen to confirm your bias either. You're going to need to do some sincere deep listening in order to learn new things. 4. Read For my money, smart thinking requires a lot of reading. It all comes down to collecting more and more information from more and more perspectives. Read a wide-range of materials on a wide-range of topics. I like to switch up and read informational books that relate to my work; psychology, education, theatre. Then, I read a novel or something not so directly related to my day-to-day hustle. ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ Read multiple newspapers, not just the one that most closely mirrors how you already think. Go for breadth. Read up on all sorts of topics. Read, read, read. Then read some more. Watch out for disreputable sources though. There are a lot of self-proclaimed experts out there nowadays, especially online. If you want to learn how to evaluate your sources and distinguish a reputable from a disreputable source, go to your local library and ask a friendly librarian. They would love to teach you all about evaluating sources to help you become a more-informed consumer of information. 5. Know What You Don't Know Truly brilliant people know what they don't know. They don't pretend to know everything. The more you learn, the more you realize how much you don't know. The world is incredibly complex, and there is an almost infinite number of perspectives from which to analyze that world. So, it doesn't make any sense when I meet someone who acts like they know everything about everything. It's just not possible. The smartest people I know definitely know what they don't know. And they're not shy about admitting it. Those smart people are also curious and eager to learn more about what they don't know. I think Socrates said it best when he said, "True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us." In other words, if you're truly smart, you know that there's a whole lot that you are really dumb about. ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ Okay, maybe Socrates said it better. 6. Put Your Smartphone Down Our smartphones give us access to a lot of instant information. But that doesn't mean they're making us smarter. Studies show that we need to put our phones down, mix and mingle with the masses, get out and enjoy nature, and just generally exist sans smartphones in order to bump up our brain power. The problem has a lot to do with focus. Just having their smartphones in the same room as them made participants perform more poorly on cognitive tests. Smartphones are addictive. Think about those alluring push notifications. When we hear the chime, we drop everything and mindlessly pick up our phone. Yeah, take a break from that. If we want to beef up our focus on other things, it makes a lot of sense to put the phones down and put all our attention on other things for a moment. Try these 5 Simple Ways to Unplug and Be More Mindful In Your Life. 7. Go for Depth I know I've already told you that one strategy for how to think smart is to read up on a wide-range of topics. Well, it's also important to go for depth. Another trick for how to get smart is to dig deeply into a topic. Try to learn as much as you can about one narrow topic. Interested in the history of pants? Well, start doing your research and see where it takes you. A lot of people already do this when they get sucked down a YouTube or Wikipedia rabbit hole. They start by clicking on one page, maybe all the people who have won an Emmy, Grammy, Oscar, and Tony award (EGOTs). Before you know it, it's four in the morning and you're watching a black and white film about a donkey befriending a mouse. How in the world did you get here? This is what I'm proposing you do with your pants research. Only try to stick more closely to the topic at hand: pants. Read something about pants. Then see what sources that book or article used. Then read some of those. And so on and so on. I think you'll find that the more you learn, the more you'll realize just how much you still don't know. ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ That's the kind of smart thinking we're going for. 8. Challenge Your Mind—Learn Another Language Use it or lose it. That's really the mantra when it comes to our brains. So, if you want to think smarter, challenge your brain. One way is to learn another language. Now, I'm a notoriously slow language learner, but I still find that the process helps my brain immensely. And studies back this up, learning another language helps our concentration and focus. So if you want to think smarter, think in another language. Push your brain and really challenge yourself. The added bonus is that you'll know another language. 9. Get Out There and See the World Finally, the last strategy for how to think smart is to get out there and see the world— See and experience new people and places. Research has shown that becoming truly immersed in new cultures boosts our brain's ability to consider multiple perspectives at once. This goes back to what we were talking about before. Seriously considering multiple, diverse points of view is, simply put, smart thinking. It's critical thinking where you don't just assume you are right. It's the kind of thinking that honors the complexity of the world and is open to learning new things. Final Thoughts Thinking smart is about knowing what we don't know. It's about seeing all sides of an argument, or problem and honoring all perspectives. It's also about being genuinely curious about different people, places, and ideas. Thinking smart isn't just about acing a test. It's really a state of mind. It's about approaching interactions with the desire to really listen and learn. And it's definitely not about proving you're right or about cherry picking sources that prove what you already thought. So, admit that you don't know that much. And that's the first step to knowing a whole lot. ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ ↘ Scroll down to continue reading article ↘ More Tips for Thinking Smarter Featured photo credit: Anthony Tran via unsplash.com

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