

Applied Critical Thinking and Legal Analysis

The Learning Skills Pyramid

Applied Critical Thinking and Legal Analysis: *The Learning Skills Pyramid*

- To develop strong critical thinking and legal analysis skills, students need to:
 - Develop new patterns of thinking
 - Understand the mental processes they use when they engage in learning and problem solving
 - Appreciate and consciously develop the cognitive abilities associated with strong critical thinking
 - Approach learning and problem solving in a thoughtful, deliberate manner
 - Acquire the ability to monitor, assess, and self-regulate their learning and problem-solving efforts and the overall development of their thinking skills

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- *The Learning Skills Pyramid* is a learning and problem solving model that helps students develop new patterns of thinking, acquire strong metacognitive and self-regulatory skills, and emphasize the use and development of higher-order thought processes
- The *Pyramid* is comprised of three “tiers” that help students internalize effective, systematic ways of thinking and solving complex problems
- In each tier, the *Pyramid* depicts:
 - Cognitive abilities developed
 - Mental functions implicated
 - Sample learning activities
- Students should deliberately work through each tier in the *Pyramid* for each new topic, concept, issue or problem introduced in order to fully assimilate and internalize the material

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Team Exercise

- Following is a blank *Pyramid*, along with lists for each of the three categories of information contained in the *Pyramid* (i.e., **cognitive abilities developed**, **mental functions implicated**, and **sample learning activities**)
- The lists of information are arranged randomly and are color coded for ease of reference
- Try placing the information into the *Pyramid* to create an effective learning and problem solving model for use with your students

The Learning Skills Pyramid

For each new topic, concept, issue, or problem introduced, carefully and deliberately work through each of the three tiers, in order, exercising your higher-order thought processes and systematically integrating new information into your overall learning, understanding, and problem-solving framework. Use each tier to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of your efforts in the preceding tier(s).

Tier 3

COGNITIVE ABILITIES DEVELOPED:

MENTAL FUNCTIONS IMPLICATED:

SAMPLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

Tier 2

COGNITIVE ABILITIES DEVELOPED:

MENTAL FUNCTIONS IMPLICATED:

SAMPLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

Tier 1

COGNITIVE ABILITIES DEVELOPED:

MENTAL FUNCTIONS IMPLICATED:

SAMPLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

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COGNITIVE ABILITIES DEVELOPED:

- apply principles, concepts, and rules to new situations using sound reasoning, deductive logic, and focused analogy to reach valid conclusions
- understand the ways in which thoughts, ideas, rules, and principles can be applied in specific scenarios
- accurately and effectively communicate complex thoughts and ideas in writing and verbally
- see the “big picture”
- synthesize and assimilate thoughts and ideas
- formulate and articulate key principles, concepts, and rules using sound reasoning, inductive logic, and valid inference
- self-assess level of mastery of material and effectiveness of tier 1 activities
- accurately identify key issues and concepts
- actively read, listen, and comprehend critically, deeply, and proficiently
- self-assess level of mastery of subject material and development of learning and problem-solving skills
- understand relationships between concepts

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MENTAL FUNCTIONS **IMPLICATED:**

- apply
- create
- identify
- appraise
- differentiate
- argue
- integrate
- classify
- assimilate
- support
- criticize
- compare
- choose
- predict
- conceptualize
- connect
- defend
- evaluate
- synthesize
- distinguish
- arrange
- construct
- analyze
- predict
- formulate
- structure
- design
- evaluate
- generate
- produce
- examine
- interpret
- assess
- appraise
- compose
- judge
- question
- differentiate
- categorize
- Note: Some mental functions may be implicated in more than one tier of the *Pyramid*

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SAMPLE LEARNING ACTIVITIES:

- summarizing
- hypothetical scenarios
- concept mapping practice tests
- reviewing
- briefing
- analytical and persuasive writing
- active reading with reflective questioning
- anticipating and predicting
- outlining

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When you are finished constructing your Pyramid, list five ways you could use it with your students and/or your teaching

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____