

Glossary

Short definitions of every named thinking concept in the chapters. When a term has a kid-language rename (like confirmation bias becoming favorite-team brain), both versions are listed. Cross-references throughout.

A

Absolute words—Words that signal total certainty: “Obviously,” “definitely,” “everyone knows,” “trust me,” “100 percent.” These sound stronger than hedge words. They’re often weaker. The person using them probably hasn’t found the complications yet. See also: Hedge words.

B

Brainstorming—Real brainstorming is not the careful sharing of good ideas. It’s throwing out every idea (good, bad, weird, impossible) as fast as possible without filtering. The point is quantity first. You look for the good ones after the list is done. See also: Idea collection.

C

Chain of repetition—How beliefs travel without anyone checking them. Somebody says a thing. Somebody else hears and repeats it. A third person hears the second and repeats it. By the time a hundred people are saying it, nobody remembers that nobody ever checked. See also: The popularity trap, Telephone.

Combination—A creative move where you join two existing things together to make something new. The pencil with an eraser on top is a combination. Neither piece was invented—they were just connected for the first time. See also: Expansion, The seed.

Confirmation bias (favorite-team brain)—The way your brain notices things that agree with what you already think and misses things that don’t. When something disagrees and is too close to miss, your brain finds a reason it doesn’t

count. It happens automatically. Your brain is rooting for whatever team it picked first. The book calls it favorite-team brain. See also: Favorite-team brain.

Convergent thinking—The kind of thinking that narrows down to one answer. You start with many possibilities and work out which one is right. Critical thinking runs on convergent thinking. See also: Critical thinking, Divergent thinking.

Creative thinking—The kind of thinking that opens outward. You start with a situation and generate possibilities. You ask what could be made, changed, or tried that hasn't been tried yet. See also: Critical thinking, The two thinking muscles.

Critical mode and creative mode—The two ways the NOTICE step can run. In critical mode you look for what's wrong and what caused it. In creative mode you look for what could be different or better. The Last Chapter runs NOTICE twice, once each way, on the same situation. See also: NOTICE, Critical thinking, Creative thinking.

Critical thinking—The kind of thinking that narrows down. You start with a situation and work out what's true, what caused it, and what the right answer is. See also: Creative thinking, The two thinking muscles.

D

The D-Squad framework—The thinking process the book teaches: NOTICE the real problem → WONDER what could explain or solve it → TEST which ideas hold up. Phoebe's ZOOM OUT move sits outside the line and can happen at any point. It means stepping back to ask whether the right problem is being solved at all. The same framework works on both critical and creative problems. See also: NOTICE, WONDER, TEST, ZOOM OUT.

DASH CHECKED IT—The research sidebar in selected chapters. A short box explaining the science behind the chapter's teaching. Real experiments, real history, and once in a while a real question nobody has answered yet. For readers who want to know the why, not just the what. Optional.

Divergent thinking—The kind of thinking that generates possibilities. You start with one thing and branch outward into options. Creative thinking runs on divergent thinking. See also: Creative thinking, Convergent thinking.

E

Earned confidence—The kind of confidence that comes from actually doing the work. A doctor's certainty about a diagnosis is earned. Confidence about something you've never checked is not. The difference is whether the person has done the looking.

Evidence update—Changing your mind because you saw something new. A measurement, a test result, a fact you couldn't explain away. The strong move. A reasonable answer, replaced by a better one. Different from a pressure update, which is changing what you say because someone pushed you. See also: Pressure update.

Expansion—A creative move where you add something to what already works. A button added to a controller. The original thing still works—you just gave it one more capability. See also: Combination, The seed.

F

Favorite-team brain—The book's kid-language name for confirmation bias. Your brain roots for whatever conclusion it picked first, noticing what agrees with it and missing what doesn't. Both the attention and the memory are working for the same team. See also: Confirmation bias.

The flinch—The small feeling of embarrassment that arrives when you're wrong or when you say something you're not sure of. The book argues the flinch is taught, not innate, and that you can decide not to inherit it.

The fog—What you hit when you trace a claim back and the trail runs out. Nobody can say where it actually came from. In the book, Sully repeats something he heard from a dog at the park. And when he's asked how that dog

knew, the trail stops there. When the source is fog, the claim hasn't really been checked by anyone. See also: Source, Chain of repetition.

The fold—Saying what the room is saying instead of what you saw. Not lying, exactly, and not changing your mind. The belief stays put; only the sentence goes with the crowd. The line experiment in Chapter 14 caught people doing it and found the cure: one other honest voice. See also: The popularity trap, Pressure update.

The four moves that wreck a disagreement—The four habits that turn a normal disagreement into a fight: making it about the person instead of the idea; contempt (eye-rolls, sarcasm, “I am above you”); defending yourself before listening; and shutting down into silence. The book turns these toward friendships and siblings as warning signs, not a crystal ball. See also: Right-shape phrases, Wrong-shape phrases.

The four-word question—“How do you know?” Dash’s tool for checking a claim, and the question Chapter 10 is built on. Ask it about anything anybody tells you, including things you tell yourself. Smaller versions count—“Who’s they?” is the same question in a smaller coat. See also: Source, The fog.

H

The half-formed idea—An idea you haven’t finished thinking yet. Saying one out loud before it’s polished is what Chapter 7 asks you to practice, because a half-formed idea in the room is worth more than a finished one in your head. See also: Wild idea, The seed.

Hedge words—Small words that signal someone has thought carefully about something: “I think,” “probably,” “maybe,” “it depends,” “I’m not totally sure.” These are accuracy words, not weakness words. The person using them found some uncertainty and is telling you about it. They tell you how sure someone is. Not whether they’re right. See also: Absolute words.

I

Idea collection—What most schools call brainstorming but isn't. A few careful ideas shared, written on a board, agreed upon, and moved on from. Real brainstorming is faster, messier, and unfiltered. The careful ideas are the ones everybody else already thought of. See also: Brainstorming.

L

Listening-mind—The part of your thinking that notices things without arguing or planning. It often notices what the talking-mind misses. What it notices still needs checking. When the talking-mind runs too loud, the listening-mind can't get through. See also: Talking-mind.

N

Not knowing at all—When nobody knows the answer, not because you're not smart enough, but because the question is genuinely unsolved for everyone right now. The most interesting place to be. See also: Not knowing yet, The stilt-owl.

Not knowing yet—When the answer exists but you haven't found it. You haven't looked in the right place, had the right conversation, or waited long enough. Most everyday problems are this kind. See also: Not knowing at all.

NOTICE—The first step in the D-Squad framework. Sully's step. Identifying what's actually wrong before starting to solve it. The skill is separating the surface problem from the real one. NOTICE can run in critical mode or creative mode. See also: The D-Squad framework, Surface problem, Critical mode and creative mode.

O

One beat of pause—The move Chapter 4 asks you to learn: not ten minutes, not even one whole minute. Just enough time to notice you haven't actually checked what the problem is yet. The feeling of urgency makes you skip it. One beat is often enough to catch a guess before you act on it. See also: Surface problem.

THE ONGOING MYSTERY—The story running underneath the book. A box at the end of the Introduction and every even-numbered chapter, where Dash works out what’s going on with Sully a little at a time. **The boxes go in order.** They’re the one part of the book that doesn’t work out of order.

P

The popularity trap—What a roomful of agreement does to your mouth. You can know the answer, have seen it yourself, and still say what everyone else is saying, because agreeing is easier than being the only one. The trap isn’t in what you believe. It’s in what you say out loud. See also: The fold, Wide agreement.

Pressure update—Changing what you say because someone pushed you, not because you saw new evidence. It looks like changing your mind from the outside. It usually doesn’t stick. See also: Evidence update.

Q

The question cage—The way the shape of your question limits the answers you can find. “How do I get under the couch?” can only produce answers about getting under the couch. When your answers aren’t working, the cage might be the problem. See also: Reframing.

R

Reframing—Replacing a question that isn’t working with a different question about the same situation. The goal is to escape the question cage. Reframing is the heart of the ZOOM OUT move. See also: The question cage, ZOOM OUT.

Right-shape phrases—Phrases that keep a disagreement focused on the idea rather than the person: “I see it differently because—” “What if we tried the opposite?” “That works, except in this case.” See also: Wrong-shape phrases.

S

The seed—The real part hiding inside a wrong idea. Most ideas in a brainstorm have no seed. A few have something inside them (a mechanism, a direction, a

piece) that could become real if you changed the parts that don't work. See also: Brainstorming, Wild idea.

SOLVE—Not a separate step. What you get when NOTICE, WONDER, TEST, and ZOOM OUT all work together on the same problem. As Baz puts it, when you put the moves together, you can solve anything or build anything. The Last Chapter demonstrates it. (Chapter 18 adds the honest footnote: some questions stay open. The moves still tell you which kind you're holding.) See also: The D-Squad framework, ZOOM OUT.

Source—Where information comes from. A source can be solid (a scientist who studied it, a doctor who treated it) or it can be fog: somebody told somebody who told somebody, and nobody ever checked. See also: Chain of repetition, The fog, Telephone.

The stilt-owl—An invented answer created to fill a not-knowing gap. Named for an animal Baz made up because not knowing what a night sound was had been bothering him. The stilt-owl felt like an answer. It wasn't one. The urge to invent a stilt-owl is universal. See also: Not knowing at all.

Surface problem—The first problem you notice. Often not the real problem. The real problem is often something quieter hiding underneath it. Also called a symptom: the thing you can see, caused by something you can't. See also: NOTICE.

T

Talking-mind—The part of your thinking that's always busy. Narrating, defending, planning, worrying. Loud even when it's silent. When the talking-mind runs at full volume, the listening-mind can't get through. See also: Listening-mind.

Telephone—The game where a sentence passes through ten people and arrives completely changed at the end. Used in the book as a model for how information degrades as it's repeated. Not through lying, but through normal, imperfect human passing. See also: Chain of repetition, Source.

TEST—The third step in the D-Squad framework. Dash’s step. Taking the ideas from WONDER and figuring out which ones hold up, which explanation fits the evidence, which solution would actually work. See also: The D-Squad framework.

Trained noticer—Someone who notices on purpose instead of by accident. Detectives, doctors, scientists, artists, and inventors all do it. Five different jobs, one shared skill. Their eyes aren’t better; they’ve practiced asking what’s here that shouldn’t be, and what should be here that isn’t. See also: NOTICE.

Try This—The practice exercise near the end of each chapter. One small thing to do. Every box wears its own name (Beat Baz, Count the Definitelys), with (Try This) tagged after it. Most take five minutes. No special supplies needed; for some, you’ll want a pen and paper. Most you can do by yourself. All optional.

The two thinking muscles—The book’s name for the pair of skills it teaches together: critical thinking (working out what’s true) and creative thinking (generating what could be). Most people train one and neglect the other; the book’s bet is that you build both at once. See also: Critical thinking, Creative thinking.

W

Wide agreement—When a lot of people are all saying the same thing. It isn’t evidence, and it can’t make a claim true. But it can press on your mouth even when it hasn’t changed your mind. A fact about the room, not about the thing. See also: The popularity trap, The fold.

Wild idea—An idea that sounds wrong, goofy, or impossible on first hearing. Often the source of the real idea. The wild idea isn’t a detour from thinking. It’s what thinking looks like when it’s working. See also: The seed, Wild-idea muscle.

Wild-idea muscle—The creative capacity to generate ideas past the point where they start sounding stupid. Most kids have it. Most adults have trained themselves out of it. The book argues it can be rebuilt by practicing going further down the list than feels comfortable. See also: Wild idea.

WONDER—The second step in the D-Squad framework. Baz’s step. Generating possibilities before deciding which one is right. In critical mode: what could have caused this? In creative mode: what could this become? See also: The D-Squad framework, Brainstorming, Wild idea.

Wrong-shape phrases—Phrases that turn a disagreement into a fight by making it personal. “That’s stupid.” “YOU don’t get it.” “Whatever.” Each one shifts the disagreement away from the idea and toward the person. See also: Right-shape phrases.

Z

ZOOM OUT—Phoebe’s move in the D-Squad framework. ZOOM OUT means stepping outside the problem entirely and asking whether the right problem is being solved at all. It is not a step in the line—it can happen at any point in the process. Phoebe sits apart from the other three exactly so she can do it. See also: The D-Squad framework, Reframing, Listening-mind.