How to structure your ideas

Now that we know how to generate our ideas, we must now structure them by creating connections between them that will reveal their deeper significance. In chapter 10 of *Smart Thinking* we learned how to do this. The following exercises are designed to give you the opportunity to practise and develop these skills.

Exercise 1:

Structuring ideas – Books

Create a structure of categories and sub-categories for the books on the following list. You will have to invent categories into which the books will go and, for some, there will be sub-categories, even sub sub-categories.

Chambers English Dictionary

Encyclopaedia of Science

Ezra Pound – Collected Poems

The Cases of Sherlock Holmes

Brave New World – Aldous Huxley

Book of Modern Verse

Roget’s Thesaurus

The Complete French Dictionary

The Shorter German/English Dictionary

History of the Second World War

Tudor History

WB Yeats – Collected Poems

1984 – George Orwell

Modern Moral Philosophy

An Introduction to Biology

Modern Crime Stories

The Complete Agatha Christie

First World War Poetry

Writer’s Thesaurus

Encyclopaedia of Plants and Flowers

George Orwell – a biography

History of the Industrial Revolution

Modern Physics

Eighteenth Century Poetry

Memoirs of a General

Contemporary Bioethics

Dictionary of National Biography

Modern Detective Stories

Collected Letters of Albert Einstein

Oxford English Dictionary

Introduction to Political Philosophy

Sons and Lovers – D. H. Lawrence

Poetry of the 1930s

Elementary Chemistry

Great Expectations – Charles Dickens

Answer:

Of course, there is no right answer to this. You may have decided to structure these books into different categories. But as you no doubt realise, the important consideration is which structure will help you most in finding a book when you need it? So, I suggest this as a possible answer.

1. References

1.1 Dictionaries

1.1.1 English dictionaries

Chambers English Dictionary

Oxford English Dictionary

1.1.2 Foreign language dictionaries

The Complete French Dictionary

The Shorter German/English Dictionary

1.2 Encyclopaedias

Encyclopaedia of Science

Encyclopaedia of Plants and Flowers

1.3 Thesauruses

Roget’s Thesaurus

Writer’s Thesaurus

2. Biographies

2.1 Biography

George Orwell – a biography

2.2 Autobiography

Memoirs of a General

Collected Letters of Albert Einstein

2.3 Dictionary

Dictionary of National Biography

3. Non-fiction

3.1 History

History of the Second World War

Tudor History

History of the Industrial Revolution

3.2 Philosophy

Modern Moral Philosophy

Contemporary Bioethics

Introduction to Political Philosophy

3.3 Science

Modern Physics

An Introduction to Biology

Elementary Chemistry

4. Fiction

4.1 Literary fiction

Sons and Lovers – D. H. Lawrence

Great Expectations – Charles Dickens

4.2 Political novels

Brave New World – Aldous Huxley

1984 – George Orwell

4.3 Crime novels

The Cases of Sherlock Holmes

Modern Crime Stories

The Complete Agatha Christie

Modern Detective Stories

5. Poetry

5.1 Individual poets

Ezra Pound – Collected Poems

WB Yeats – Collected Poems

5.2 Periods

First World War Poetry

Eighteenth Century Poetry

Poetry of the 1930s

5.3 Collected verse

Book of Modern Verse

Exercise 2:

Causal analysis

On pages 159-67 of *Smart Thinking* we learned a simple five-step practical method for structuring our ideas using causal analysis. Now use the method to reveal possible solutions to the following problems by working through the five steps to find their causal structure.

1. You are stranded on the only uninhabited coral island of a group in the Southern Pacific, approximately 25 degrees south. It is June and you come ashore in an undamaged motorised life-boat containing some fuel with standard survival equipment as listed:

4 lifebuoys each with 100ft. of buoyant line;

1 life jacket for each person;

1 line throwing apparatus;

1 fire pump;

2 fire hoses;

2 fire extinguishers;

1 fireman’s axe;

6 distress signals;

1 compass;

1 First Aid kit which you yourself have equipped;

1 torch;

1 pair binoculars;

Navigational equipment with relevant maps and charts.

You yourself are unhurt as you come ashore on a sandy beach. With you are:

(i) one 21-year-old male who, against your advice, attempted to swim ashore and is now severely injured with a fractured skull and massive internal haemorrhage;

(ii) one 7 months expectant mother, shaken but all right;

(iii) her husband, useless and hysterical;

(iv) one 25-year-old male, concussed but regaining consciousness;

(v) his wife, prostrated with seasickness but otherwise all right;

(vi) one 18-year-old male with sprained ankle;

(vii) his girlfriend, bruised and shaken with superficial cuts sustained on landing.

You have enough food and water for eight persons for two days. You are in charge: what do you do?[[1]](#endnote-1)1

2. You are on the editorial staff of a large selling cycling magazine. Over the last six months there has been an economic downturn and the magazine has seen a decline in circulation as it struggles to retain its readership. This is at a time when more people are turning to cycling than ever before: commuters, retired people who want to stay fit and the increasing number of recreational cyclists and families who want to get their children away from their computer games.

The problem seems to be that as cycles and cycling equipment have benefited from the new carbon fibre frames and technologically advanced equipment they have become more expensive at a time when people are trying to cut back on their spending. As a result, a magazine that focuses on the latest advances in equipment and design with full-page spreads on expensive bikes costing many thousands of pounds seems to be a luxury that the average reader can do without.

The editorial team has already tried to address the problem by putting celebrity faces on the cover and running stories about celebrities, their bikes and how they fit cycling into their busy lives. But it has had very little impact. Therefore, as the final resort, each team member has been asked to set out suggestions for a complete redesign. There are two key considerations that your redesign suggestions must take account of:

a) the editor-in-chief wants to retain as many current subscribers as possible, because ongoing subscriptions represent the bulk of the magazine’s income;

b) and the redesign must bring in new subscribers by appealing to all those new cyclists who are taking it up for the first time or who are returning to it after many years of not having sat on a bike.

1. 1 Cambridge Entrance Examination, 1982. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)