

Tips When Starting a Notebook

1. Give this process—learning how to use the notebook—a little time. It's a bit like starting an exercise program: you may need a few weeks to adjust before you begin to have fun and to feel the full benefit. To get started, set aside some time—perhaps 20 minutes a day, perhaps 2 hours a week—when you can step back and think about the big “pivot points” in your life.
2. Learn to shift and to move easily across every level of thought—sometimes writing out the big questions, sometimes jotting down the names of a few people you want to contact, sometimes listing titles of books to read or articles to study. If you like, paste in some motivational or inspirational messages for yourself.
3. Be open: approach life—and every decision—with a kind of humility, wonder, and curiosity. No matter how smart, each of us knows so little that there are endless opportunities to learn and improve.
4. Don't try to answer all the big questions and make all the big decisions immediately. You'll often find that it helps to break them into a list of subsidiary questions. (Philip Tetlock and Dan Gardner emphasize this idea in their book *Superforecasting*.) Each new question is precious; each helps engage some other background knowledge from your own experience; each opens new avenues for further exploration.
5. Use your notebook as a way of looking ahead, trying to see out over the horizon. Jot down a few notes—as necessary—to learn from your mistakes, but never confuse the role of this notebook with the role of a journal. It's not a logbook to make some record of where you have been; it works in a realm of thought that always looks forward, that remains at the very boundary of the known and the unknown. You need to explore your dreams and see which might become real.

6. Don't censor your notes, and don't press too hard for some quick decision or some final, integrated perspective. The mind will first need time to change and grow as you study all the pieces, as you list and pursue all the subsidiary questions. Give yourself the privacy to explore ideas you're not ready to say aloud—perhaps to consider a role so new, so bold that others might think you're too ambitious.
7. Have fun and learn how to move easily among different “mental frames.” Learn to mix flights of imagination (exploring a fresh, open world of possibility) with the cold, careful use of reason (returning to ground and checking how well your plans might work). You don't need to obsess to make good decisions. It's all a question of learning how to think most carefully, not an exercise in cultivating new levels of anxiety.
8. To put it another way: use your notebook as a kind of sandbox in which you can safely play with possibilities. Much of the art comes here: there's no point in having a world that's entirely imaginary, but—equally—there's no point in keeping everything rigidly fixed in the context of your current circumstances. Be bold, be brave; don't hesitate to venture in new territory if you start to think you may have the strength to make the journey.
9. Don't hesitate to write out concrete plans, but let them incubate before implementation. Give the subconscious mind some chance to react: see how you feel, explore any sense of fear or unease that may arise. Bounce the new plan off of friends. Remember: ideas can shift, reflecting moment-to-moment changes in the perception of our current situation. It takes time to be sure that new ideas and new plans are consistent with everything we know, with all other aspects of our life, with the full range of outcomes that is possible as we implement our new plan.
10. Use your notebook as a workspace where you can capture and explore good ideas in any form, from any source, at any stage of development. When—let us say—someone

else offers you other ideas on how to use a notebook, just print them out, paste them in, and study them as you refine your technique. Every new idea offers a fresh opportunity for growth, but you can't take full advantage until you understand the suggestion, evaluate the relevance to your own life, and update your plans. Your notebook, and the precious time you spend with it when planning and thinking, set up the kind of "metabolic system" needed for full development of mind. You may feed off the ideas of others, but you'll be able to digest and rethink and rearrange and connect as you work to build a full, rich, world of mind for yourself.

11. After a month or two—after you see how well things work with a pen and a physical notebook—it's time to pause and ask yourself: would some other system be better? Are you more likely to return to the "notebook" if it is on your computer instead? (Or does that bring too many risks of distraction?) Remember, the only real issue involves learning to understand how *you* think, learning how *you* can best develop your own mind and your own methods of thought. Don't be afraid to experiment, but *do* try to have some kind of notebook that helps you keep this flywheel spinning, that helps you mix all these myriad modes of thought, that lets you move above all the day-to-day demands of your career and family life.
12. If you are—perhaps—inspired to help tackle some of the hardest problems on the planet, please get in touch with us at humanity2050.org. (And please sign up for updates as we discuss other "tools for thought" needed to reach your full potential, and needed when addressing the challenge of ensuring a livable human future.)