

Study Guide for *The Art of Thinking*

by Dr. Leonard Peikoff

Lecture One

- How is objectivity in thinking related to volition?
- Why is it not possible simply to will oneself to believe an idea?
- What is the difference between knowing an idea is correct and actually holding that idea as true in one's mind? What effects arise from this difference?
- At what stage of learning should one use the devil's advocate method in interrogating an idea?
- What does it mean to stop "gathering data" and "asking questions" about an incorrect idea? How does one do this?
- Using an original example, discuss the way that someone might encounter clashing contexts on a specific point and the step-by-step means to resolve that.
- How does automatization play a role in using volition to solidify an idea that one accepts?

Lecture Two

- What is integration in the broadest sense?
- Why is integration a necessary component of human thinking?
- How do both deduction and induction represent a kind of mental integration?
- Using original examples, demonstrate inductive elements of induction and deduction.
- How can one recognize thinking or a thinking method that is not integrated?
- What is the difference between horizontal integration and vertical hierarchy? What is the same?
- Attempt to find an argument in an opinion piece that violates the hierarchy principle. Describe how the concepts or arguments fail because of this.
- Drawing from a field other than philosophy, illustrate arguments or concepts that exist on different levels of a hierarchy.

Lecture Three

- What does it mean for something to be essential?
- Why is causality closely involved in determining essentials?

- What is the difference between a distinguishing feature and a fundamental feature?
- How does knowing an essential assist in cognition?
- What are the two key steps in determining the essence of a thing?
- Using or creating an original example, what does thinking in non-essentials look like?
- What is the key to defining the essence of a philosophy?
- Select three sentences from a contemporary opinion piece and derive the essence of each sentence.
- Selecting a new character from one of Ayn Rand's novels, describe the essence of that character.

Lecture Five

- Complete the optional letter to the editor assignment described by Dr. Peikoff at the beginning of the lecture.
- Where does the idea of principle come from? How did it come to stand for a mental and not a physical thing?
- What is the difference between a generalization and a principle?
- What key role do principles play in thinking?
- How is it different to resolve a question back to principles in a specific field versus in philosophic ideas more generally?
- What can a principle add to a process of cognition?
- Using an original example, describe the four key steps in thinking in principle.
- What is the process for validating a principle?
- Do men always act on principle, even if they do not know it?
- What is the relationship between thinking in essentials and thinking in principle?

Lecture Six

- What is the epistemological basis of certainty?
- What facts give rise to the distinction between provisional and certain?
- How does one determine a standard of evidence?
- In what specific ways can you be certain of the future?
- When is it appropriate and not appropriate to use statistics?
- Is it always necessary to specify the context of one's claims?

- Does specifying context help you avoid being wrong?
- What is the difference between revising one's ideas and discovering that one was wrong?
- Is it possible to say that one can make errors of knowledge avoidable? If so, how?
- What is the difference between an error of method and a limitation of knowledge?

Lecture Seven

- Using a piece of your own writing, work through the tips and guidance that Dr. Peikoff highlights.