Human Resources and
Skills Development Canada

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**Skills and Employment
Office of Literacy and Essential Skills**

Thinking Tip Sheet

*This tool provides tips to help you improve your **thinking** skills with a focus on problem solving, making decisions, and planning and organizing tasks. Review each of the tips below and practise the ones that are most relevant to your learning needs.*

Problem Solving

Before you try to solve a problem:

❏ Get all the information you can by asking questions such as who, what, when, where, why and how (see Practice and Learning Exercises)? This may involve doing research, referring to publications (e.g. policies, procedures, reports), and speaking to colleagues and others who may have the information that you need. Remember to make notes as you gather information so that you can refer to them later.

❏ Reflect on how you solved similar problems in the past – you may be able to use these experiences to help you solve current problems.

❏ Ask your peers or co-workers for help – they may have dealt with a similar problem and can provide you with helpful advice.

❏ Try doing things in new ways. Brainstorm with a group of people to help identify different ideas and approaches to solving problems.

❏ When a problem affects others, consider their points of view before choosing a solution.

❏ When a problem is complicated, break it down into smaller parts and deal with one part at a time.

❏ Evaluate the pros and cons (see Practice and Learning Exercises) of using a particular solution.

Decision Making

Before making a decision:

❏ Keep an open mind and consider all the options available. Ask questions like "which option will best meet my objectives?" and "what are the potential impacts of a particular option?"

❏ Consider all the information that is available and write it down. Use tools like a Venn diagram (see Practice and Learning Exercises) to organize the information and help you visualize the best choice.

❏ Ask others for their advice. They may have made similar decisions in the past and can share their experiences.

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❏ If your decision is going to affect others, it is important to find out about their concerns and needs. Keep them informed throughout the decision making process so that they understand why and how the decision was made.

❏ Reflect on your own past experiences (e.g. think about what helped you make a decision in the past and how that might help you make the best decision this time).

Job Task Planning and Organizing

Use these tips to help you effectively manage your time and organize your tasks:

❏ Make a to-do list (see Practice and Learning Exercises) of all the things you need to get done and organize them by their level of importance. To help you figure out what is most important – think about what the impact would be if you did not complete the task on time, or did not complete it at all.

❏ Limit each task to a **single** action. For example, if you write down "develop budget for personal expenses" on your to-do list, you can break that task down into smaller actions such as reviewing your income, identifying daily, weekly and monthly expenses, and calculating utility costs.

❏ Coordinate your tasks with those of your co-workers where necessary (e.g. make a schedule for using a shared piece of equipment).

❏ Plan for each day. To-do lists may need to be revised daily, weekly or monthly to accommodate unexpected delays or new priorities.

❏ In addition to to-do lists, use tools such as agendas or calendars to more effectively organize your tasks and your time.

**Literacy and Essential Skills—
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To learn more about Literacy and Essential Skills and other related tools, visit **hrsdc.gc.ca/essentialskills.**

Thinking Practice and Learning Exercises

This tool contains practice exercises that can help you improve your thinking skills in three areas: problem solving, decision making and job-task planning. Use the Thinking Tip Sheet to help you work through the exercises. A Learning Plan Template is also included to help guide your skills development.

Exercise 1: Problem Solving (Understand the Problem)

A key step in problem solving is to gather all the necessary information (also called fact-finding) to help you understand the problem. The more information you have, the easier it will be to recognize the cause(s) of the problem, and identify and evaluate potential solutions. There are six basic questions you can ask to help get the information you need: *who, what, when, where, why* and *how?*

Choose a problem you are currently facing or that you faced in the past and write it down in the space below.

Problem: _____

_____

_____

Use the six basic questions (who, what, when, where, why and how?) to help you gather as much information as possible about the problem and record it in the table below.

Tip: *First, write down all the information <u>you already know</u>, and then proceed to gather the rest of the information – this will help you figure out what information is missing so you can focus your fact-finding efforts.*

Who?	
What?	

When?	
Where?	
Why?	
How?	

Exercise 2: Problem Solving (Identify Solutions)

Now that you have gathered all the information you can about the problem, you can begin to identify potential solutions or options.

1. Using the information from **Exercise 1**, think of 2 possible solutions *(i.e. what you could do to fix it)* and what result each solution might have *(i.e. what might the outcome be if you choose that solution)* and write them in the table below.

2. Next, list the **pros** and **cons** of each solution. The **"pros"** would include all the reasons why you think a particular solution **is** a good option, and **"cons"** would include all the reasons why you think a particular solution may **not** be the best option.

Potential Solution	Possible Result	Pros	Cons
Option A.			
Option B.			

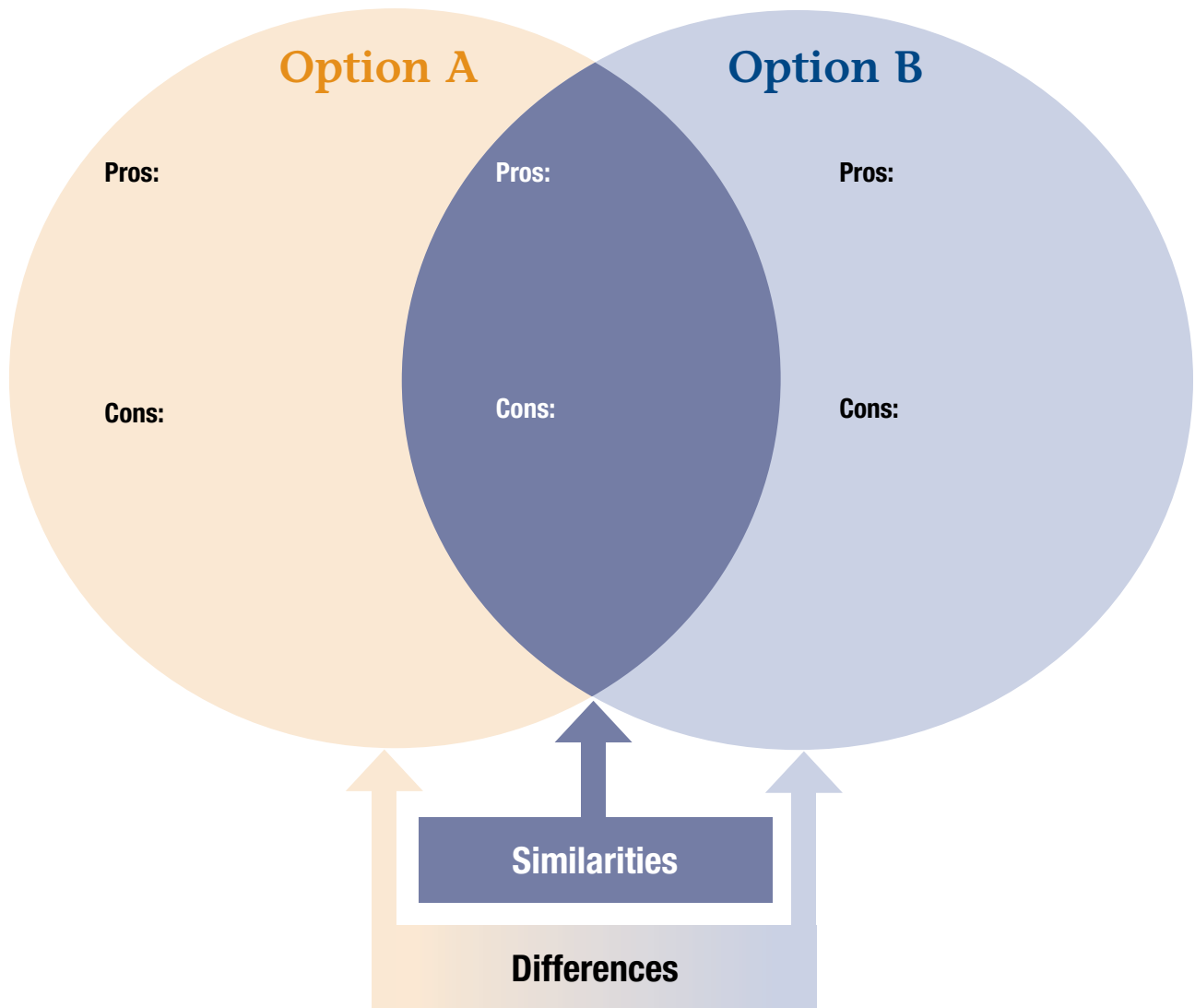## Exercise 3: Decision Making (Making the Best Choice)

When you are faced with making a decision, you can use tools and techniques such as a *Venn diagram* to organize information to help you make the best choice. This particular technique involves using a simple diagram to compare the similarities and differences between options, and to help determine which is the better one. Follow these easy steps to help you create your own Venn diagram (*an example of a completed diagram follows this exercise*).

1. Following the examples from **Exercises 1 and 2**, think of a decision that you need to make and write it down in the space below.
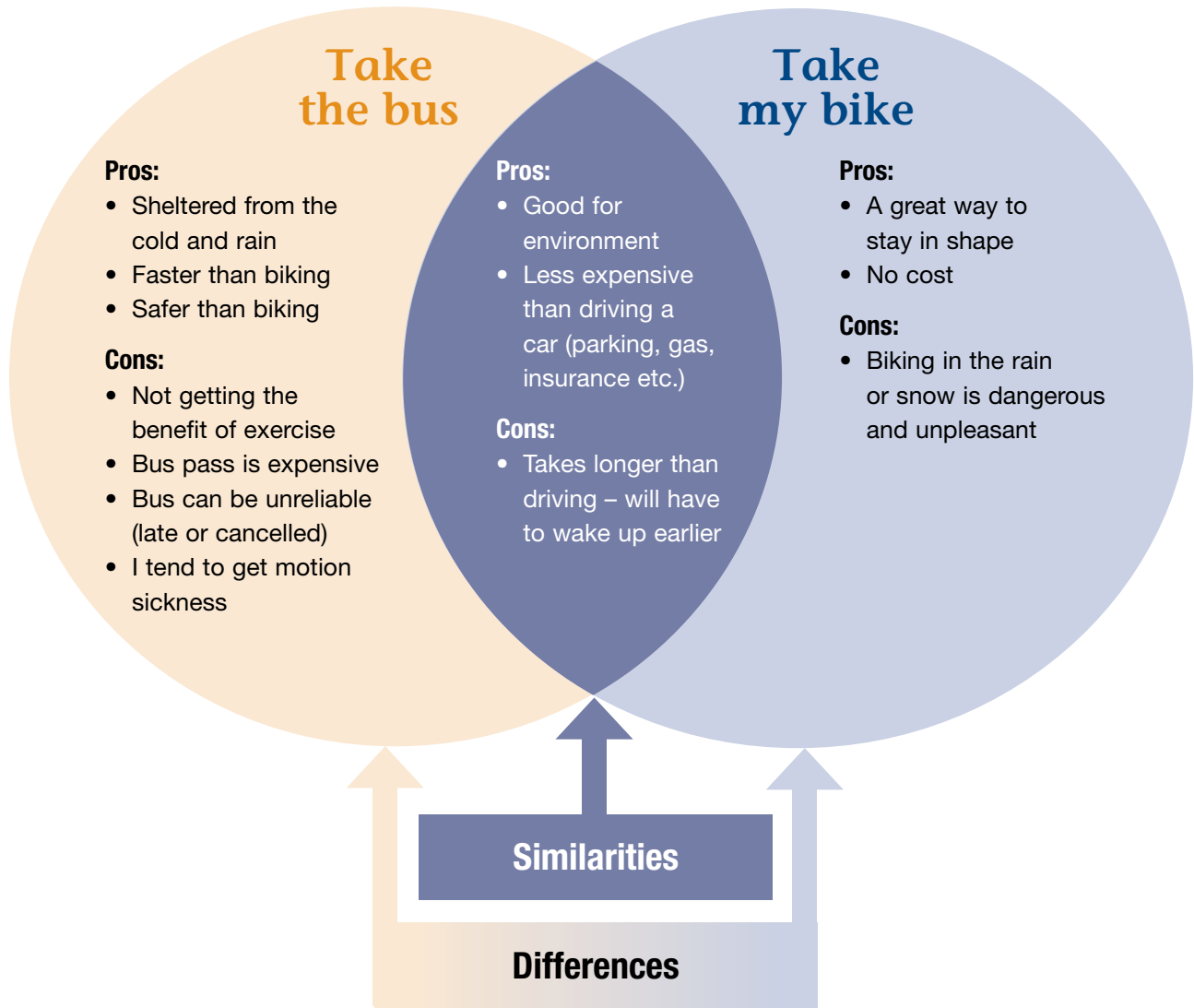
Decision: _____

_____

2. Review your notes from **Exercise 2**. In the area where the two circles overlap (the **similarities** section), copy all the points that are similar between Options A and B.

3. In the areas outside the overlapping section, copy all of the points from **Exercise 2** that are **different** about each option. Separating the pros and cons will help you to consider which option has more benefits than disadvantages.

4. Choose the option that has more benefits than disadvantages and that you feel addresses the problem best.

Example of a completed Venn diagram:

Decision to be made: *Whether to bike or take a bus to work?*

Take the bus

Pros:
- Sheltered from the cold and rain
- Faster than biking
- Safer than biking

Cons:
- Not getting the benefit of exercise
- Bus pass is expensive
- Bus can be unreliable (late or cancelled)
- I tend to get motion sickness

Pros:
- Good for environment
- Less expensive than driving a car (parking, gas, insurance etc.)

Cons:
- Takes longer than driving – will have to wake up earlier

Take my bike

Pros:
- A great way to stay in shape
- No cost

Cons:
- Biking in the rain or snow is dangerous and unpleasant

Similarities

Differences

Exercise 4: Job Task Planning and Organizing

A to-do list is a handy tool to help you keep track of what you need to get done and in their order of importance. The following exercise will guide you through the process of developing your own to-do list:

1. First, list all of your tasks (things you need to get done) in the 1st column. *(**Tip:** Break down large tasks into smaller parts and record them separately – e.g. if your task is to "pay bills", break it down into pay photocopy repair, phone and internet bills.)*

2. Next, decide which tasks are of a high, medium or low importance and record the rating in the 2nd column. *(**Hint:** if you need help determining the level of importance of a task – think about what the impact would be if you do not complete the task on time or do not complete it at all.)*

3. Identify a completion date for each task and record it in the 3rd column.

4. In the 4th column, number each task in the order of what needs to get done first. Use the *Priority Rating* and *Target Completion Date* columns to help you decide the best order.

To-Do Items	Priority Rating (low, medium or high)	Target Completion Date	Priority Ranking
e.g. Pay invoice for photocopy repair	*High*	*End of the month*	*3*

5. Now that you have prioritized all of your to-do items, you may want to re-organize them so that they appear in their order of importance. Use the to-do list below to re-order your tasks. *Note: To-do lists may need to be revised daily, weekly or monthly, to accommodate unexpected delays or new priorities.*

6. Under the "Action Taken" column, you may want to note what you have done to complete the task on your to-do list (e.g. paid bill on the 15th of the month).

To-Do Items	Priority Rating (low, medium or high)	Target Completion Date	Action Taken
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			

My Learning Plan

Complete this worksheet to help guide your skills development. Set a target date to reach your goals and use this date to track your progress.

My learning goal is to improve my **thinking** skills by: _____ (insert date).

Tips or practice exercises I can use to improve my **thinking** skills include:

_____

_____

_____

Additional resources (e.g. books, courses, workshops, co-workers and/or supervisors) to help improve my **thinking** skills include:

_____

_____

_____

Additional learning activities (e.g. job shadowing, new work responsibilities, volunteering in my community) to help improve my **thinking** skills include:

_____

_____

_____

Examples that show I have improved my **thinking** skills include:

_____

_____

_____

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