

# Preface

I've enjoyed reading books about mental models for decades, and my bookshelves are jammed full of them. Their pages are filled with psychological experiments that reveal the surprising outcomes that result from cognitive biases, which are both interesting and entertaining. There is also a small industry dedicated to providing mental model resources to aspiring learners: subscription websites, video courses, and of course, more books. Many of these promise to improve your intellect (and, by extension, your wealth and professional achievement) and offer either a bite of knowledge each day (via email) or an extensive survey that encompasses scores of models. I have sampled most of these offerings but remain unsatisfied.

This book introduces a different approach, a middle ground of sorts. I respect the scholarly study of mental models and the fascinating insights into human behavior that ensue from delving deeply into them. But I also understand that people's lives are busy, and something that will not be used is not useful. So, this book is structured to deliver a large amount of *usable* knowledge in as *short* and *memorable* a package as possible. As such, only thirty-two concepts are discussed—the ones that I believe are both the most important and broadly applicable. Exhaustive proof and documentary evidence are relegated to the footnotes and suggested readings—trust me but verify if you wish. And, most importantly, the concepts are rolled up into larger, actionable areas—decisions, learning, understanding, investing, and happiness. There is not an ounce of fat in this book—it is 100 percent lean muscle, designed to help you improve your intellectual and emotional lives. It is my sincere hope that the time you invest in reading this book and absorbing its contents will rank among the best-spent of your academic and professional careers.

That said, this book, like many aspects of life, can be seen both as an end and a beginning. For those readers seeking an efficient introduction to topics that will meaningfully impact their lives, this is the book for you.

For those readers seeking an introduction to the broad array of mental models as the launching point for a deeper and wider intellectual exploration, this book is also for you. For those readers who have no idea what mental models are or why they are important, hopefully this book will be for you as well!

If there is one overarching principle that you should take away from reading this book, it is that it is highly worthwhile to take the time to *pause to think*. *Pause* before making an important decision in order to implement a structured framework around it. *Pause* before learning something new to ascertain the most effective way of learning it. *Pause* before passing judgment until you understand all the cognitive biases at play. *Pause* when you are feeling unhappy to understand the roots of those feelings and how to actively counteract them. It doesn't have to be a long pause! But developing the habit of taking a small step back from the whirlwind of life will pay major dividends.

Let me start by defining these terms, as “mental model” is somewhat vague and can be used in different contexts. Any model is a simplification of reality that is employed to make a reasonable judgment, so it is helpful to further separate these ideas into concepts and frameworks. The term “important concepts” will be used for ideas that are significant enough to have broad application among various intellectual disciplines, and I will discuss thirty-two of these in the first part of the book. The term “important frameworks” will reflect the synthesis of these concepts with other ideas into actionable systems that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of your thinking in different areas.

This book is organized in a fashion which hopefully you will find clear and concise. But just because it is short doesn't mean that the contents are simple—on the contrary. These are complicated and, at times, counterintuitive ideas, and you may need to think them through a few times to really grasp them. Hopefully, you will enjoy both the journey and the destination!

**Part I. Important Concepts**

Chapter 1. Cognitive Biases

Chapter 2. The Humanities

Chapter 3. Investing and Science

Chapter 4. Economics and Business

Chapter 5. Probability and Statistics

**Part II. Important Frameworks**

Chapter 6. Decisions

Chapter 7. Learning

Chapter 8. Understanding

Chapter 9. Investing

Chapter 10. Happiness

Now, *pause*, take a breath, and let's get started!



Pause to Think

