THE SOLOMON'S DECISION LAB

A five-step practice for thinking through a personal decision

Use this guide with the one-page worksheet. Work at your own pace.

THE CORE IDEA

Solomon’s paradox describes a possible gap between how wisely we reason about other people’s problems and our own. Psychological distance invites you to examine your situation from a slightly less immersed perspective - without pretending your feelings or context do not matter.

01 DESCRIBE THE DECISION

State the choice in one sentence. Add your deadline, the main constraints, and who may be affected.

Ask: What exactly needs deciding now - and what can wait?

02 CREATE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE

Imagine a trusted friend facing the same facts. What would you want them to consider? Try using your own name instead of “I.”

Ask: What advice would I give, and what facts or concerns support it?

03 COMPARE REALISTIC OPTIONS

Include more than one viable path when possible, including waiting, gathering information, or keeping things as they are.

Ask: What are the benefits, costs, risks, unknowns, and long-term effects of each?

04 CHOOSE A PRACTICAL NEXT STEP

You may not need to settle everything today. Choose a useful, safe next action - preferably one that preserves options when uncertainty is high.

Ask: What is the smallest sensible action I can take, and what would change my mind?

05 REVIEW THE OUTCOME

Set a review date. Compare what happened with what you expected, note what you learned, and adjust without judging yourself harshly.

Ask: What did I learn, what surprised me, and what should I do differently next time?

Keep the method balanced:
emotions can carry information; evidence, values, and trade-offs also deserve a place.

Apply the method with care

A thinking aid - not an automatic answer.

MAKE THE WORKSHEET USEFUL

- Write short, concrete answers. Separate what you know from what you predict or fear.
- Treat emotions as information, not defects. Ask what each feeling may be signaling, then check it against facts.
- Do not force a false choice. Consider postponing, gathering evidence, asking someone trustworthy, or seeking professional input.
- If options are hard to compare, identify what information would genuinely change your choice.

A SMALL EXAMPLE

DECISION	**A student is deciding whether to join a time-intensive project.**
FACTS	The project offers experience; the time commitment is not fully clear.
FEARS	Worry about missing out, and worry about falling behind in coursework.
NEXT STEP	Ask for an estimate of weekly hours and a trial period before committing.

WHEN TO USE IT - AND WHEN TO GET MORE SUPPORT

OFTEN USEFUL FOR

Everyday or non-urgent choices about study, work, priorities, relationships, or personal goals - especially when you have time to reflect and can compare more than one realistic option.

NOT ENOUGH ON ITS OWN

Emergencies, immediate safety concerns, coercion or abuse, severe distress, or consequential medical, legal, and financial choices requiring expertise. Seek appropriate help; use the worksheet only to organize questions.

USING THE AI THINKING-PARTNER PROMPT

AI can help organize options and questions, but it may misunderstand context, miss relevant facts, or sound more certain than the evidence warrants. Check important claims independently. Do not share unnecessary identifying or sensitive details. For high-stakes decisions, consult an appropriately qualified professional.

SCIENCE, SCOPE, AND REFERENCES

This resource is inspired by research, not validated as a standalone intervention. Grossmann and Kross (2014) reported three experiments (N = 693) on wise reasoning about close-relationship conflicts; self-distancing instructions reduced the self-other asymmetry in two studies. Separate experimental work suggests third-person self-talk can affect emotional responding in specific laboratory tasks. These findings do not establish that the worksheet improves every decision. Replication, context, stakes, and individual differences matter.

1. Grossmann, I., & Kross, E. (2014). Exploring Solomon’s paradox: Self-distancing eliminates the self-other asymmetry in wise reasoning about close relationships in younger and older adults. Psychological Science, 25(8), 1571-1580. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614535400

2. Moser, J. S., et al. (2017). Third-person self-talk facilitates emotion regulation without engaging cognitive control: Converging evidence from ERP and fMRI. Scientific Reports, 7, 4519. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-04047-3

Practical reminder: the aim is not to become emotionless or perfectly certain. It is to consider the situation from more than one angle, make uncertainty visible, and choose a reasonable next step.