



Ulisse  
Soft Skills for Employability

# EXERCISES FOR IMPROVING *CRITICAL THINKING*



## INTRODUCTION

*Critical thinking is the analysis of facts to form a judgment, the personal view on a topic of a student. It presupposes assent to rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use which are hardly teachable using standard pedagogical approaches. In fact, it entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities as well as a commitment to overcome native egocentrism and sociocentrism.*

*For this reason, here we propose an exercise, created for the Ulisse course, that is named skilling me softly, that has the aim of formalize students' idea and look at these ideas from different point of view.*

### 1. Skilling me softly

The goal of the exercise is to make it possible for students to apply critical thinking on the field, by reflecting on fuzzy and hard to discuss topic. In this case we decided to use the concept of soft skill as a core concept to describe in the exercise, but teachers can decide to use other ill-defined concepts. The exercise is divided in 3 steps that can be sequential or not, and each step should last 20 minutes.

#### 1.1. Steps of the exercise

*Step 1: Student should write down their mental model of Soft Skills through a concept map. In the map, each block is a concept, each line a relation between two concepts. Each block and line need to have a name. Students must try to keep the names as short and simple as possible, to have a synthesis of the concept. The duration for this step is 15 minutes.*

*Step 2: First of all, one student presents the mental model in 3 minutes in front of the class. While speaking, the rest of the class tries to write down the mental model described by the colleague. Then, the class, guided by the teacher, compare their starting mental models with the one presented in 7 minutes. Finally, the class will discuss about on differences/similarities between the models in 5 minutes.*

*Step 3: The class is divided in three groups. Each group will create a shared concept map of the concept of soft-skill and then, the class will discuss about on differences/similarities between the models in 15 minutes.*

## Tools and resources

*The exercise can be done in person (students can use their laptop or an A4 sheet to write) or online, using collaboration tools such as google docs or Microsoft Teams.*

### 1.2. Suggestions for the trainers

*Problem: Students can get stuck in the fear of the white sheet. For this reason, especially during step 1, the teacher (if in presence) should circulate to check that no one get stuck. IN the online version, the teacher should remember students to ask if they are having troubles in listing the concepts.*

*Problem: What a concept is, and how to explain this to students. Concept is a concept the changes in different context. For this reason, the student can find it difficult to find the right level of grain for their maps. This problem is part of the exercise.*

### 1.3. References

*de Ries, K.E., Schaap, H., van Loon, AM.M.J.A.P. et al. A literature review of open-ended concept maps as a research instrument to study knowledge and learning. Qual Quant (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01113-x>*