

Parts, Perspectives, Me (For Exploring Complexity)

A routine for exploring the complexity of objects and systems.

Choose an object or system and ask:

- What are its **parts**?
 - What are its various pieces or components?
- What **perspectives** can you look at it from?
 - Different users, makers; different physical perspectives.
- How are **you** involved?
 - What connections do you have? What assumptions, interests, or personal circumstances shape the way you see it?

PURPOSE

What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

The routine helps students explore complexity by encouraging them to look closely at the details of something, considering its various viewpoints, users, and stakeholders, and reflecting on their own connections and involvement with it.

APPLICATION

When and where can I use it?

The routine can be used to explore virtually any object or system. It works particularly well with objects that have many parts – and can be taken apart—as well systems that have various roles and users connected to them, such as systems involved in managing or providing resources, social systems, organizational systems, transportation systems or governance systems. The three elements of this routine can be introduced all at once, but each of the steps encourages a different kind of thinking, so it is helpful to distinguish the steps from one another, and to give each step time to unfold.

LAUNCH

What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

What are some tips for the 'parts' step? Give students plenty of time to look at or otherwise experience the topic in detail. If the object is physically present, students can sketch it, or make a diagram. If appropriate, they can take it apart. (Taking things apart—from doorknobs to old household appliances to toys—is a particularly powerful way to look closely at the parts of something)

What are some tips for the ‘perspectives’ step? Encourage students to imagine different physical viewpoints if appropriate, for example by zooming in, zooming out, or taking a bird’s eye view. Encourage them to think broadly about how different people interact or are connected to the object or system: who is involved in making it, who is affected by it, who cares about it? When possible, encourage students to gather information about other perspectives, for example by interviewing people or doing research.

What are some tips for the ‘How are you involved?’ step? Encourage students to consider the different ways the object or system touches their lives or the lives of people they know. Encourage them to consider any feelings, assumptions, connections, beliefs, attitudes or associations they have with it.

How can students’ thinking be made visible while using this routine? As with the other routines that begin with the naming of parts, students can make their thinking visible by creating lists, sketches, and diagrams.

FACILITATION

This activity is recommended for the following learner age ranges:

- Elementary School
 - 15-30 minutes
 - Lightly facilitated by peer/teacher/caregiver
- Middle School
 - 15-30 minutes
 - Lightly facilitated by peer/teacher/caregiver
- High School
 - 15-30 minutes
 - Lightly facilitated by peer/teacher/caregiver

This thinking routine was developed as part of the PZ Connect project at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Explore the full PZ Thinking Routine Toolbox at pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines.