

CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking is the ability to reason independently, with the support of quality evidence. This skill matters in every area of human life: it is essential to relationships, work, study, and leadership on any scale. In order to be a leader who changes the world, you need to engage with a mind trained in critical thinking.

Keep in mind that there are many kinds of thinking. Critical thinking is an inherently different skill from creative or meditative thinking.

DEFINITION AND NATURE

1. **Critical Thinking is Purposeful** – Hitchcock (2020) defines critical thinking as “careful thinking directed to a goal” (intro, para. 1). Quality thinking is not a quick or opinion-based process, but rather a thorough and truth-based practice.
2. **Critical Thinking is Analytical** – Peeler (2016) defines analysis as an unbiased examination of a concept and its implications in light of truth (p. 31). Measuring your current knowledge against facts while considering a variety of interpretations results in supported decision-making and growth.
3. **Critical Thinking is Wise** – Finn (2019) explains that a critical thinker acknowledges the limited nature of their own understanding and seeks the perspective of others to gain wisdom (pp. 360-361). Analyze different ideas to build your own knowledge on a strong foundation.
 - Solomon describes wisdom as the gathering and understanding of knowledge: “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Prov. 24:3-4).
 - One perspective is not enough, but rather “... in abundance of counselors there is victory” (*English Standard Version*, 2001, Prov. 24:6b).

STAGES OF THINKING CRITICALLY

When you come across a concept that requires critical engagement, approach the issue in stages. According to Hitchcock (2020), you might move between these stages fluidly (sec. 5, para. 3-4).

1. **Define the issue and identify your initial thoughts and feelings about it.**
 - “Observe” the issue and its effects.
 - Note your emotions and current understanding.
 - “Imagine” the possible outcomes (sec. 6, para. 2-12).

2. Research the issue.

- Pursue knowledge from credible sources.
- “Consult” different view-points on the issue (Hitchcock, 2020, sec. 6, para. 2-12).

3. Logically analyze the findings.

- Consider your research in light of morality, ethics, and faith. What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and consequences of the argument?
- Acknowledge your feelings, but do not allow emotion alone to dictate the way you think: decide *how* you will allow your emotions to affect your thinking (Finn, 2019, p. 359).
- Establish your opinion.

4. Apply your knowledge and theories to see if they hold up to reality.

- Hold your opinions up to the light by “experimenting” with their application to reality (Hitchcock, 2020, sec. 6, para. 2-12).
- Does your theory work with the way the world operates? If so, continue to live by it, but stay open to analyzing new evidence as it comes.

CHARACTER TRAITS TO DEVELOP

Critical thinking is as much a way of living as it is a scholarly discipline. To foster this kind of character, consider the below traits and skills noted by Hitchcock (2020, sec. 8.1, para. 1-9).

- Desire evidence for your ideas
- Make curiosity a habit
- Pay attention to details
- Wait to judge
- Embrace change
- Be brave
- Seek wisdom

PRACTICE NOW

References

Peeler, D. L., Jr. (2016). The importance of critical thinking: A cost management and budget slant. *Armed Forces Comptroller*, 61(2), 30–32.

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Finn, P. (2019). Critical thinking is a noble endeavor—A response to Paul's question: An invited essay. *American Annals of the Deaf*, 164(3), 355-362.

Hitchcock, D. (Fall 2020). Critical thinking. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, E. N. Zalta (ed.).

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