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.

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).

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2. **Research the issue.**
   - Pursue knowledge from credible sources.
   - “Consult” different viewpoints 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

**References**


