What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking includes a complex combination of skills including rationality, self-awareness, honesty, open-mindedness, discipline and judgment. An individual is using critical thinking skills when s/he relies on evidence rather than emotion, never ignores evidence, follows evidence wherever it leads whether it is the desired outcome or not. Critical thinkers weigh the influences of motives and bias, recognize their own assumptions, prejudices, biases, or points of view, and avoid emotional impulses, selfish motives, nefarious purposes, or other modes of self-deception. Critical thinkers focus outward, away from themselves. Another way to describe it is reasonable, reflective, responsible, and skillful thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. Critical thinking in large part is the scientific method applied by ordinary people to the ordinary world. This is true because critical thinking replicates this well-known method of scientific investigation: a question is identified, an hypothesis formulated, relevant data sought and gathered, the hypothesis is logically tested and evaluated, and reliable conclusions are drawn from the results.

Importance of critical thinking

So much has become known about the world that the information content has become enormous. In conjunction with this, most educators and textbook writers came to believe that they must seek to transmit as much factual information as possible in the time available. Textbooks grew larger and curricula became more concentrated; students were expected to memorize and learn increasingly more material. Acquisition of scientific facts and information took prece-dence over learning scientific methods and concepts. Inevitably, the essential accompanying task of transmitting the methods of correct investigation, understanding, and evaluation of all of this scientific data (which constitutes critical thinking) has become lost. Too frequently educators teach students what to think instead how to think. The first goal of education, "what to think," is so traditionally obvious that instructors and students may focus all their energies and efforts on that task and find that this goal alone is so overwhelming that they have time for little else. On the other hand, the second goal of education, "how to think" or critical thinking, is often so subtle that instructors fail to include it and students fail to realize its absence.

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Characteristics of critical thinking

Engaging in critical thinking means that the individual attempts to:
- evaluate all reasonable inferences
- consider a variety of possible viewpoints or perspectives,
- remain open to alternative interpretations
- accept new explanations, models, or paradigms because they explain the evidence better, are simpler, have fewer inconsistencies, or include more current data
- recognize new priorities in response to a reevaluation of the evidence or reassessment of interests
- not reject unpopular views out of hand
- be precise, meticulous, comprehensive, and exhaustive
- resist manipulation and irrational appeals, and avoid snap judgments
- understand the idea of degrees of belief
- find similarities and analogies that are not superficially apparent
- learn independently and have an abiding interest in doing so
- generalize problem-solving techniques to domains other than those in which learned
- be sensitive to the difference between the validity of a belief and the intensity with which it is held
- recognize the fallibility of his/her own opinions, the probability of bias in those opinions, and the danger of weighting evidence according to personal preferences

Why engage in critical thinking?

Critical thinking enables individuals to recognize a wide range of subjective interpretations and uses of otherwise objective data, and to evaluate how well different interpretations fit the evidence. Critical thinkers are aware that facts may be facts, but how we interpret them may vary. When the information content of a discipline increases, it becomes even more vital to spend time, not learning more information, but learning methods to acquire, understand, and evaluate the great amount of new information that is known now or will surely soon follow. Truthfully, it seems counterproductive to simply memorize and learn more new and isolated facts when future facts are likely to eventually displace these. Critical thinking means asking appropriate questions, gathering relevant information efficiently and creatively sorting through this information, reasoning logically from this information, and reaching reliable and trustworthy conclusions about the world that enable one to live and act successfully.

What is non-critical thinking?

Non-critical thinkers tend to be passive and take a simplistic view of the world. They see things in black and white, or as either-or, rather than recognizing a variety of possible understandings. They see questions as yes or no with no subtleties or “grey” areas. They fail to see related elements and recognize important linkages and complexities.

Non-critical thinkers are often narcissistic and egotistical, focusing internally. They assume their facts as the only relevant ones, their own perspectives are the only sensible ones and their own goals are the only valid ones.
Resources


Web Resources


[http://www.criticalreading.com/critical_thinking.htm](http://www.criticalreading.com/critical_thinking.htm)


[http://www.studygs.net/crtthk.htm](http://www.studygs.net/crtthk.htm)


[http://www.alamo.edu/sac/history/keller/ACCDitg/SSCT.htm](http://www.alamo.edu/sac/history/keller/ACCDitg/SSCT.htm)

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