The Art of Critical Thinking
“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.”

-Aristotle
Why Think Critically?

• Society is becoming more polarized every day. News pundits on both sides of every issue try to convince us they are right.

• We are bombarded with more information on a daily basis than our ancestors might have experienced in a lifetime.

• The average person sees/hears close to **3000** pieces of advertising every day.

• We need to be able to make sense of all this data.
• Schools now teach students **WHAT** to think, not **HOW** to think.

• Einstein thought that learning **HOW** to think was even more important than being taught the knowledge in one’s particular field (Ideas & Opinions).
We need to be able to:

• Identify
• Analyze
• Evaluate
• Reason about

Arguments: Visual & Verbal

In order to come to responsible conclusions & make intelligent decisions

to present convincing premises to support our conclusions
What critical thinking is NOT:

• Biased
• Uninformed
• Distorted
• Prejudiced
• Partial
• Egocentric
It is also not:

**Thinking a lot!**

- One can think long and hard and uncritically, or one can make conclusions and decisions based on thinking at length but using faulty premises.
What IS Critical Thinking?

“Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking and issues with a view to making improvements and increasing understanding.”

Dr. Richard Paul
Remember:

It takes practice to become a critical thinker!
Critical thinking involves:

• Evaluating information through employing diverse skills like:
  • Analyzing
  • Conceptualizing
  • Listening
  • Asking questions
  • Reasoning
  • Defining
  • Refining our thought processes
  • Examining
  • Synthesizing
Universal Intellectual Standards

- Clarity
- Accuracy
- Precision
- Relevance

- Depth
- Breadth
- Logic
- Does it make sense?
Clarity

• “We must harness our ingenuity and come together to confront and overcome the challenges we face.”

WHAT???

What does this mean? How do you make sense of it?

ALWAYS ASK QUESTIONS

ALWAYS ASK FOR CLARIFICATION
Accuracy

• Make sure the information you are receiving is correct.
  “Chickens are mammals.”
• Well, that is clear, but it is not accurate.

VERIFY THE FACTS
Precision

- An idea can be clear and accurate but not precise. Be specific and make sure the information you receive is specific, too.

For example:
- “That is too heavy” may be a clear and accurate statement, but it could be more precise.
- “That is 15 pounds over the allotted weight limit” is much more precise.
Relevance

• An idea can be clear, accurate, and precise but not relevant to the issue.

• For example:

  “We need a photographer for this job.”
  “I can take photos. I can also process film.”
  “Sorry. We need someone with experience in digital photography. Your ability is not relevant here.”
Depth

• Often, ideas are oversimplified.

• For example: when discussing the drug problem in America, one response is the “Just Say No” campaign.

• This “solution” overlooks any problems or issues and lacks any real depth of thought.
Breadth

- When thinking lacks breadth, it fails to consider any other points of view, as when something is egocentric or socio-centric.

- Ask yourself:

  AM I CONSIDERING ALL SIDES HERE? IS IT FAIR?

Reason at the highest quality level possible in a fair-minded way.
A Critical Thinker:

• Raises vital questions and formulates them clearly

• Gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret effectively

• Thinks open-mindedly and remains open to change

• Comes to well-reasoned conclusions

• Communicates his/her thoughts effectively
Three Levels of Thought

Level 3
Highest order: *explicitly reflective * highest skill level
routine use of critical thinking tools * consistently fair

Level 2
Higher order: *selectively reflective * high skill level
*lacking critical thinking vocabulary * inconsistently fair
*may be skilled in sophistry

Level 1
Lower order: *unreflective * low/mixed skill level *frequently relies on “gut” feelings *self-serving or self-deceived

* seemingly plausible but actually invalid or misleading reasoning
Stages of Critical Thinking Development

**Accomplished**: Critical skills have become second nature

**Advanced**: Skills are beginning to be internalized

**Practicing**: Skills are advancing nicely

**Beginning**: Trying to improve, but without regular practice or skills

**Challenged**: Significant problems with thinking

**Unreflective**: Unaware of problems with our thinking; ego-centered
The Problem with Egocentric Thinking

IT’S TRUE BECAUSE I BELIEVE IT
Innate egocentrism. I assume that what I believe is true without questioning any biases (“I’m right because my beliefs must be right”).

IT’S TRUE BECAUSE WE BELIEVE IT
Innate sociocentrism. My groups’ beliefs are true even though I have never questioned them (“my country right or wrong”).

IT’S TRUE BECAUSE I WANT TO BELIEVE IT & WE’VE ALWAYS DONE IT THIS WAY
Innate wish fulfillment. I must put my beliefs in a positive light. What feels good to me does not require me to change my thinking or admit I might be wrong (“We’ve always done it this way”).

IT’S TRUE BECAUSE IT’S IN MY OWN INTEREST TO BELIEVE IT
Innate selfishness. Whatever justifies my getting more power, money, or advantage is what I will believe (“Poor people are all lazy. If they worked harder, they would succeed”).
The Problem of Socio-centric Thinking

Challenged critical thinkers tend to internalize the dominant prejudices of their society or culture without question. They tend to:

- place their own culture, nation, religion above all others
- select self-serving, negative descriptions of those who are different
- internalize group norms and beliefs
- blindly conform to group restrictions
- fail to think beyond cultural or religious prejudices
- fail to distinguish universal ethics
- fail to think how other cultures are also shaped by their own prejudices
- fail to think historically or anthropologically
- fail to see socio-centric thinking as an impediment to learning
A Critical Thinking Exercise: Challenging Our Assumptions & Values

• Pretend that you have been assigned the task of conducting a tour for aliens who are visiting earth and observing human life. You're riding along in a blimp, and you float over a professional baseball stadium. One of your aliens looks down and becomes very confused, so you tell him that there is a game going on.

• Try to answer the following questions for him:
  • What is a game?
  • Why are there no female players?
  • Why do people get so passionate watching other people play games?
  • What is a team?
  • Why can't the people in the seats just go down on the field and join in?
Using Art to Develop Critical Thinking Skills

• What is the purpose of this piece of art?
• Am I raising the right questions when I evaluate this art?
• What information am I using to draw my conclusions?
• Is it accurate?
• What information do I still need to make an informed evaluation?
• Is there another way to interpret this piece?
• Am I looking at this from an egocentric or socio-centric position?
• Are my own biases getting in the way of my evaluation?
• What am I taking for granted?
• What assumptions am I making?
• Should I consider another point of view?
Finally:

A critical thinker tries to always remain open to new ideas and interpretations of situations, has the ability to admit when he or she is wrong, and is willing to let go of old ideas if they turn out to be wrong.
Contact Us!

• Our Website:
  • www.untdallas.edu/writingcenter

• Our Email:
  • untdwritingcenter@unt.edu

• Like Us on Facebook:
  • www.facebook.com/UNTDWritingCenter

• YouTube, Blog, and Twitter coming soon!