

CRITICAL THINKING

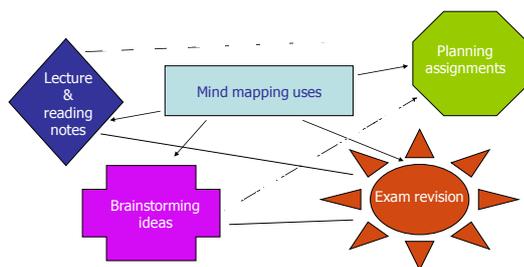
What is critical thinking?

Being a critical thinker is about being active in learning and thinking; for example in questioning what you see, hear or read about instead of automatically accepting it as accurate, credible or valid.

Did you know? Critical thinking is highly valued in all aspects of university work (and in life in general).

Some ways to develop your critical thinking skills:

1. Become sceptical. Ask questions about almost everything. Some useful questions are: Why? So what? What if..?
2. Ask those who disagree with you to tell you their reasons for thinking the way they do. Engage in respectful dialogue.
3. Play with ideas. Use brainstorms and concept/mind mapping to explore new relationships between ideas.



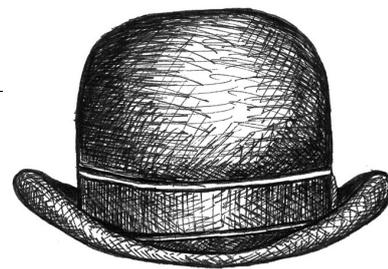
TIP: Be prepared for the unexpected.

Thinking critically, you might explore options you would not normally consider. This can sometimes send you down a path that turns out to be a dead end. While it might seem like time wasted, you may get valuable insights that you can use later in your writing or research.

Critical thinking is sometimes described as thinking outside the box.

Try this

How many uses can you think of for this object?*



The more you know about your subject or research area the more competent you will become at critically examining what you read and hear.

What does critical thinking involve?

It includes a range of activities, such as:

- categorising and finding relationships,
- making evaluations and judgements,
- identifying your own biases,
- identifying the writer's assumptions and/or biases,
- using your imagination and creativity,
- checking if the writer has made unsupported generalisations, and
- checking if the evidence is backed by research or if it is anecdotal.

*Some ideas to get you started: water filter, foot warmer, flower pot, fish catcher, worm farm, seed collector...

Learning how to ask the right questions

The more questions you ask, the better you get at asking them. Pay attention to the kinds of questions others are asking. Learn from them. Begin with general questions and then refine your questioning to become more specific.

Questions to get started:

- What argument is being made?
- What evidence is presented? Is it relevant, reliable, good quality?
- What is not included? Are there any gaps in the evidence or argument? (for example, is there sufficient reference to other counter arguments or other scholars' work?)
- In whose interest is it to see the world this way?
- How can this be applied?
- What assumptions are made?
- Does the conclusion follow logically from the evidence provided?
- What if ...? Asking questions like this is a great way to see the material differently. For example, 'What would happen if X were left out of the sample?'

Check out this example:

'People who have pets live longer' is a claim.

We can ask ourselves if this is true or false. In order to decide this (that is, to make a judgement) we should ask ourselves a series of questions (as the basis for our evaluation).

Some questions you could ask:

- What evidence is given to support and/or refute this view?
- What is the context for this claim (i.e. is the claim just about Western society or is it making a general claim?)
- Does it matter what kind of pet?
- What assumptions are being made? For example, is living longer assumed to be a good thing?
- Is it assumed that people with pets enjoy having pets, or that *all* people like pets, or need the 'benefits' offered by pets?
- Are there any social or environmental costs which might reduce the value of this finding?
- Are there other ways to get the same health benefits?

Keep asking questions. Have fun!

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