

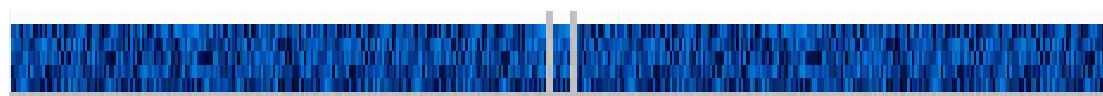


Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum Project

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Critical thinking definitions

Contributed by Barbara Fowler, Longview Community College.



The following are definitions of Critical Thinking according to the people who write textbooks and articles on the subject. While this does not make them automatically correct, it does indicate that they have spent some time thinking about the topic. The best definition for Critical Thinking may well be your own - to help with that task, the best approach to the topic I found was written by **Peter A. Facione, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Santa Clara University**. His article [can be found on the web](#) and ordered for educational purposes for \$0.80. (An order form is at the end of the article.)

Critical thinking is deciding rationally what to or what not to believe."

Norris, Stephen P. "Synthesis of Research on Critical Thinking. *Educational Leadership*, v 42 n 8 May 1985. 40-45.

"Critical thinking is the use of those cognitive skills or strategies that increase the probability of a desirable outcome. It is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed - the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions when the thinker is using skills that are thoughtful and effective for the particular context and type of thinking task. Critical thinking also involves evaluating the thinking process - the reasoning that went into the conclusion we've arrived at the kinds of factors considered in making a decision. Critical thinking is sometimes called directed thinking because it focuses on a desired outcome."

Halpern, Diane F. *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking*. 1996.

Critical thinking is the formation of logical inferences.

Simon and Kaplan, 1989.

Critical thinking is the development of cohesive and logical reasoning patterns. Stahl and Stahl, 1991.

Critical thinking is careful and deliberate determination of whether to accept, reject, or suspend judgment.

Moore and Parker, 1994.

"The purpose of critical thinking is, therefore, to achieve understanding, evaluate view points, and solve problems. Since all three areas involve the asking of questions, we can say that critical thinking is the questioning or inquiry we engage in when we seek to understand, evaluate, or resolve."

Maiorana, Victor P. *Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum: Building the Analytical Classroom*. 1992.

Critical thinking skills: understanding the meaning of a statement, judging ambiguity, judging whether an inductive conclusion is warranted, and judging whether statements made by authorities are acceptable.

Smith, 1990.

Critical thinking is "the examination and testing of suggested solutions to see whether they will work."

Lindzey, Hall, and Thompson, 1978.

"Broadly speaking, critical thinking is concerned with reason, intellectual honesty, and open-mindedness, as opposed too emotionalism, intellectual laziness, and closed-mindedness. Thus, critical thinking involves: following evidence where it leads; considering all possibilities; relying on reason rather than emotion; being precise; considering a variety of possible viewpoints and explanations; weighing the effects of motives and biases; being concerned more with finding the truth than with being right; not rejecting unpopular views out of hand; being aware of one's own prejudices and biases, and not allowing them to sway one's judgment." Kurland, Daniel J. *I Know What It Says . . . What does it Mean?* 1995.

Critical thinking is "reasonably and reflectively deciding what to believe or do."

Ennis (1985)

Critical thinking is "the art of thinking about your thinking while you are thinking in order to make your thinking better: more clear, more accurate, or more defensible."

Paul, Binker, Adamson, and Martin (1989)

Critical thinking is "a process which stresses an attitude of suspended judgment, incorporates logical inquiry and problem solving, and leads to an evaluative decision or action."

NCTE Committee on Critical Thinking and the Language Arts.

"Critical thinking includes the ability to respond to material by distinguishing between facts and opinions or personal feelings, judgments and inferences, inductive and deductive arguments, and the objective and subjective. It also includes the ability to generate questions, construct, and recognize the structure of arguments, and adequately support arguments; define, analyze, and devise solutions for problems and issues; sort, organize, classify, correlate, and analyze materials and data; integrate information and see relationships; evaluate information, materials, and data by drawing inferences, arriving at reasonable and informed conclusions, applying understanding and knowledge to new and different problems, developing rational and reasonable interpretations, suspending beliefs and remaining open to new information, methods, cultural systems, values and beliefs and by assimilating information."

MCC General Education Initiatives

Uses of critical thinking:

"underlies reading, writing, speaking, and listening . . . the basic elements of communication"

"plays an important part in social change . . . institutions in any society - courts, governments, schools, businesses - are the products of a certain way of thinking."

"helps us uncover bias and prejudice."

"is a path to freedom from half-truths and deceptions."

"the willingness to change one point of view as we continue to examine and re-examine ideas that may seem obvious. Such thinking takes time and the willingness to say three subversive words: *I don't know.*"

Critical thinkers: distinguish between fact and opinion; ask questions; make detailed observations; uncover assumptions and define their terms; and make assertions based on sound logic and solid evidence.

Ellis, D. *Becoming a Master Student*, 1997.

Attributes of a critical thinker:

- asks pertinent questions
- assesses statements and arguments
- is able to admit a lack of understanding or information
- has a sense of curiosity
- is interested in finding new solutions
- is able to clearly define a set of criteria for analyzing ideas
- is willing to examine beliefs, assumptions, and opinions and weigh them against facts
- listens carefully to others and is able to give feedback
- sees that critical thinking is a lifelong process of self-assessment
- suspends judgment until all facts have been gathered and considered
- looks for evidence to support assumption and beliefs
- is able to adjust opinions when new facts are found
- looks for proof
- examines problems closely
- is able to reject information that is incorrect or irrelevant

Ferrett, S. *Peak Performance* (1997).

"Critical thinking is best understood as the ability of thinkers to take charge of their own thinking. This requires that they develop sound criteria and standards for analyzing and assessing their own thinking and routinely use those criteria and standards to improve its quality."

Elder, L. and Paul, R. "Critical Thinking: Why we must transform our teaching." *Journal of Developmental Education* 18:1, Fall 1994, 34-35.

Definitions of Critical Reading:

"(1) the process of making judgments in reading: evaluating relevancy and adequacy of what is read . . . " (2) an act of reading in which a questioning attitude, logical analysis, and inference are used to judge the worth of what is read according to an established standard . . . Among the identified skills of critical reading involved in making judgments are those having to do with the author's intent or purpose; with the accuracy, logic, reliability and authenticity of writing; and with the literary forms, components, and devices identified through literary analysis."

Harris and Hodges. (1981). *A Dictionary of Reading and Related Terms*, 74.

Critical evaluation is "the process of arriving at a judgment about the value or impact of a text by examining its quality in terms of form, style, and rhetorical features, the readability of the author and the consistency between ideas it presents and the reader's experience, including . . . internal evaluation . . . and external evaluation . . ."

Harris and Hodges. (1995). *The Literacy Dictionary*, 48.

Critical readers are:

- willing to spend time reflecting on the ideas presented in their reading assignments
- able to evaluate and solve problems while reading rather than merely compile a set of facts to be memorized
- logical thinkers
- diligent in seeking out the truth
- eager to express their thoughts on a topic
- seekers of alternative views on a topic
- open to new ideas that may not necessarily agree with their previous thought on a topic
- able to base their judgments on ideas and evidence
- able to recognize errors in thought and persuasion as well as to recognize good arguments
- willing to take a critical stance on issues
- able to ask penetrating and thought-provoking questions to evaluate ideas
- in touch with their personal thoughts and ideas about a topic
- willing to reassess their views when new or discordant evidence is introduced and evaluated
- able to identify arguments and issues
- able to see connections between topics and use knowledge from other disciplines to enhance their reading and learning experiences

Schumm, J. S. and Post, S. A. (1997). *Executive Learning*, 282.



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Inquiries to: michael.connelly@kcmetro.edu

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