

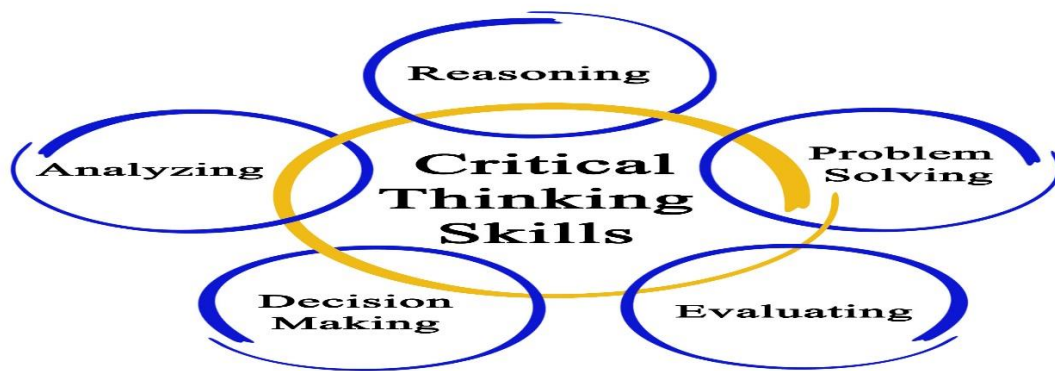
Course: Study Skills

Level: Second year L.M.D

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Critical Thinking



By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- ✓ Understand what critical thinking is
- ✓ The main characteristics of a critical thinker
- ✓ Recognise some of the benefits associated with critical thinking skills.
- ✓ Recognise the main barriers to the development of good critical thinking skills.
- ✓ The process of critical thinking.

Introduction

Critical thinking is an important and vital topic in modern education. All educators are interested in teaching critical thinking to their students. Many students can find it difficult to order their thoughts in a logical, consistent, and reasoned way, or they take all information they learn for granted. This lesson, therefore, highlights what is meant by the concept of 'critical thinking'. It also considers some of the benefits along with the main characteristics associated with critical thinking skills. Recognising the main barriers to the development of good critical thinking skills

are also covered in this lesson. Last, the process of how to think critically is also dealt with in this unit.

1.What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is defined as a kind of thinking, which seeks answers to questions regarding any existing knowledge, which is not clearly defined, or which has not clear-cut answers. In this respect, Cottrell (2005) defined the concept of critical thinking as ‘a cognitive activity, associated with using the mind. Learning to think in critically analytical and evaluative ways means using mental processes such as attention, categorization, selection, and judgement’ (p.1).

To be a critical thinker, Glaser (1941) emphasized the importance of the following:

- **Persistence:** considering an issue carefully, and more than once.
- **Evidence:** evaluating the evidence put forward in support of the belief or viewpoint.
- **Implications:** considering where the belief or viewpoint leads – what conclusions would follow, are these suitable and rational; and if not, should the belief or viewpoint be reconsidered?

2.The main characteristics of a critical thinker:

Critical thinkers are

- Critical thinkers are those persons who can move beyond “typical” thinking models to an advanced way of thinking.
- Critical thinkers produce both more ideas and improved ideas than poor thinkers.
- Critical thinkers tend to see the problem from many perspectives, to consider many different investigative approaches, and to produce many ideas before choosing a course of action.
- Critical thinkers test their first impressions, make important distinctions among choices, and base their conclusions on evidence rather than their own feelings.
- See problems as exciting challenges.
- Have understanding as a goal.
- Use evidence to make judgments.
- Are interested in others’ ideas.
- Think before acting.

- Avoid emotionalism.
- Keep an open mind.
- Engage in active listening.

3. Benefits of critical thinking skills

Cottrell (2005) stated the following benefits:

- Improved attention and observation.
- More focused reading.
- Improved ability to identify the key points in a text.
- Skills of analysis that the student can choose to apply in a variety of situations.

In turn, Murawski (2014) highlighted the following benefits of critical thinking in the classroom

- ✓ Students who are critically thinkers could take charge of their own learning.
- ✓ Students who develop critical thinking skills often practice those skills well for the future. These skills may, in fact, literally change their lives completely.
- ✓ Using these skills, students tend to expand the perspectives from which they view the world and increase their ability to navigate the important decisions in learning and in life.
- ✓ Today it is important that students learn critical thinking skills, so they can be both the inventors and the critics of the new information.
- ✓ It is prudent to remember that to think critically is not to criticize in a negative manner but rather to “**think deeply or to question.**” The goal of **critical thinking** is to learn a way to think more deeply, solve problems better, communicate, collaborate and innovate more effectively in personal as well as organizational lives.

4. Barriers to critical thinking:

Cottrell (2005) stated the following barriers that could hinder the critical thinking process:

a. Misunderstanding of what is meant by criticism

Some people assume that 'criticism' means making negative comments. As a result, they refer only to negative aspects when making an analysis. This is a misunderstanding of the term. **Critical evaluation** means identifying **positive** as well as **negative aspects**.

b. Lack of methods, strategies or practice

Although willing to be more critical, some people do not know which steps to take next in order to improve their critical thinking skills. Others are unaware that strategies used for study at school and in everyday situations are not sufficiently rigorous for higher-level academic thinking and professional work. With practice, most people can develop their skills of critical thinking.

c. Reluctance to critique experts

There can be a natural anxiety about critically analysing texts or other works by people that students respect. It can seem strange for students who know little about their subject, to be asked to critique works by those who are clearly more experienced. Some students can find it alien, rude or nonsensical to offer criticism of practitioners they know to be more expert than themselves.

d. Insufficient focus and attention to detail

Students may not give interest and attention to details, but rather to the general focus of information.

5. The process of critical thinking:

Critical thinking is a complex process that requires a set of high order thinking skills. This **process** moves from **descriptive** thinking, to **analytic** thinking, to **evaluative** thinking.

Model to Generate Critical Thinking:

