

Critical Thinking Skills – A Guide

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Examine your thinking skills – consider your thoughts and learn to think critically and analytically, as a process or guide.

Critical thinking is a cognitive process that can help you to develop a better understanding of a subject and achieve more.

Essential Critical Thinking/Analysis – A process:

1.	Information	Gather and assess all required and relevant information. Identify the focus of your assignment, understand and interpret what you have read and all other sources of your information.
2.	Understand	Investigate key points, assumptions, arguments and evidence, plus understand the wider context – read more.
3.	Analyse	Evaluate key components; examine how these key components fit together and how they relate to each other. Develop an evaluative and selective approach.
4.	Compare	Explore similarities and compare differences between ideas that you are researching.
5.	Combine	Your different sources of information to provide an argument or idea you are constructing. Look for connections between the different sources that help you to shape and support your ideas.
6.	Evaluate	Assess ideas and decide whether these ideas are relevant to your requirements, the evidence on which these ideas are based and how it relates to other relevant ideas.
7.	Perspective	Understand and be clear about your own perspective, throughout the process to help you to clarify your thinking and help you to direct your research.
8.	Justify	Develop arguments, consider solutions, make conclusions based on evidence and identify implications. Find, consider and provide the proof.
9.	Reasoning	Present your reason(s) in a convincing and logical order, to support your conclusion(s).
10.	Apply	The understanding you have gained to your response, to your assignment.
11.	Structure	Your argument(s), once you have finalised your position and identified good reasons to support your conclusion(s), the next step is to consider how you will organise your reasons and evidence into a clear structure.

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Critical thinking skills can help you to:

- Improve your attention and observation
- Focus your reading and research
- Improve your ability to identify key points and not be distracted with less important material
- Improve your ability to respond to appropriate points
- Help you to get your point of view across more easily
- Provide you with analytical skills that you can apply in a variety of situations

Other useful points:

- Plan and structure your study time, including time to critically analyse and apply critical thinking
- Thinking is part of learning. Think about what you are studying and revisit parts you find difficult
- Make/keep notes plus note your own thoughts/point of view on the topic and make notes of supported evidence
- Whatever you are studying – make time to stop and make sure that you understand and can engage with the content
- Question what you are studying, so that you can justify a position or claims you make by reference to other sources of evidence
- Make sure you can identify the different parts of your material and examine how it all fits together as a whole
- Make time to evaluate sources of information – evidence is an important part of academic study. By examining evidence, establishing its worth compared with other evidence, will also help you to decide what information is most relevant and useful.
- Evaluate and synthesise information from a variety of sources and present your own interpretations of the information, both logically and coherently
- Using your critical thinking, analysis, reflection and evaluation skills, you will produce better assignments
- Make time to reflect on your work, and consider what you have discovered and learnt.