

CRITICAL THINKING

○ Critical Thinking Defined

- Critical thinking means making reasoned judgments that are logical and well-thought out. It is a way of thinking in which you don't simply accept all arguments and conclusions you are exposed to but rather have an attitude involving questioning such arguments and conclusions. It requires wanting to see what evidence is involved to support a particular argument or conclusion. People who use critical thinking are the ones who say things such as, 'How do you know that? Is this conclusion based on evidence or gut feelings?' and 'Are there alternative possibilities when given new pieces of information?'

Additionally, critical thinking can be divided into the following three core skills:

- ◉ Curiosity is the desire to learn more information and seek evidence as well as being open to new ideas.
- ◉ Skepticism involves having a healthy questioning attitude about new information that you are exposed to and not blindly believing everything everyone tells you.
- ◉ Finally, humility is the ability to admit that your opinions and ideas are wrong when faced with new convincing evidence that states otherwise.

6 Critical Thinking Skills You Need to Master Now

- Critical thinking skills are extremely important in developing a successful career.
- Have you heard that before? Chances are you've heard it many times, such as when you began applying for your first job or maybe when you were passed over for a promotion. Whenever it was, there is usually one problem.
- They never tell you what critical skills are, why you need them or how to get them!
- College students and young professionals alike are flooded with advice on why they need to develop these skills. And yet, when you ask them to explain exactly what these critical thinking skills are and how you can develop them, it's like watching the movie [Inception](#) - it doesn't make sense!
- In an effort to help you make sense of it all and finally get some answers, I broke down the six core critical thinking skills you need for your career to help you both understand why you need them and how you can develop them.

Finally... a List of *Actionable* Critical Thinking Skills

Identifying a list of skills critical to your professional career is not as easy as it may seem. I'll explain what they mean and how they may be used in a professional career.

I have included six exercises for you to complete to help you master these skills now.

Core Critical Thinking Skills



Skill 1: Interpretation

What it Means: Having the ability to understand the information you are being presented with and being able to communicate the meaning of that information to others.

Throughout your career you will be presented with a variety of information in many different types of situations. Imagine you are looking at demographic information, hoping to target a different group of customers for a new product. Interpretation skills will enable you to better decode the information and add clarity to what you have discovered - which in turn will help you better understand any potential new customer opportunities for your company.

Application Exercise:

Write down 10 emotions you feel can be paired with facial expressions, e.g. smiling equals happiness. Then give your list to a friend and ask them to randomly recreate each facial expression as you attempt to interpret the correct emotion simply by looking at their face. You will learn how to identify the i you need in order to connect the dots. How many can you correctly identify?

Skill 2: Analysis

What it Means: Having the ability to connect pieces of information together in order to determine what the intended meaning of the information was meant to represent.

Imagine you are reading a companywide memo that is discussing making changes in order to address recent movement within the business landscape. Having this skill will better provide you with the ability to “read between the lines” and help you understand how this will impact the overall strategy you have in your position.

Application Exercise:

To practice this skill, try to determine the meaning behind this Chinese Proverb: “Be the first to the field and the last to the couch.” Are you able to identify the intended meaning behind this statement? While we all analyze information a little differently, you should have been able to determine that this proverb is referencing having a hard work ethic. .

Skill 3: Inference

What it Means: Having the ability to understand and recognize what elements you will need in order to determine an accurate conclusion or hypothesis from the information you have at your disposal.

Picture yourself as a business manager; you are looking at the latest sales forecast and you see sales have decreased. It's important for you to be able to understand what additional information you may need in order to determine why that happened, including identifying internal issues, external competition or even economic conditions. The ability to understand the information you already have and determine what you may still need to find the best solution is an important skill for you to have no matter what career field you are in.

Application Exercise:

Try watching an episode of a weekly crime show. Focus on absorbing the clues in an effort to determine the mystery of who completed the crime during the episode. These shows do a fantastic job of dropping clues and bits of information along the way that can help you make an educated guess prior to the end of the episode. Were you able to identify it correctly?

Skill 4: Evaluation

What it Means: Being able to evaluate the credibility of statements or descriptions of a person's experience, judgment or opinion in order to measure the validity of the information being presented.

Imagine you are leading a focus group at work to determine how your customers view the organization's products. You ask the group a few questions that uncover several negative opinions about certain items you sell. You will need to use this skill to evaluate those responses, so you can determine if the information you received is valid and whether or not it needs to be further looked into.

Application Exercise:

With the invention of the Internet this is a skill you can hone anytime you begin a search online. For practice, run a search on how to be a leader at work to test your evaluation skills. Are you able to identify whether the information you find is reliable and valid? Being aware of additional information you may need to make this assessment is essential. (Hint: In this example, you may need to evaluate the website's URL, the author's bio and potentially many other pieces of information.)



Skill 5: Explanation

What it Means: Having the ability to not only restate information, but add clarity and perspective to the information, so it can be fully understood by anyone you are sharing it with.

Imagine you are giving two presentations for new product ideas; one to the CEO of the company, and the other to product engineers. You know both groups are extremely interested in hearing what you have to say, but you will need to be able to explain these ideas in two very different ways. The CEO may only need to hear high level ideas about the products while the engineers will need more specific product details. Your ability to clearly explain your ideas while keeping in mind who you are presenting to is important for making sure the information is understood and well received.

Application Exercise:

It's important to remember not everyone has or needs the knowledge or information you have. Practice this skill by explaining something complex that you have knowledge about to two different types of people. Use your kids and your spouse since they typically will not have the same level of knowledge of certain subjects. For example, explain to your kids and your spouse separately how a cell phone works. The explanation should be different since they have two different levels of knowledge yet both of them should receive a similar understanding of the subject.

Skill 6: Self-Regulation

What it Means: Having the awareness of your own thinking abilities and the elements that you are using to find results.

Imagine you are on the phone with a customer attempting to work through a problem they are having with your company's software, and it's your first week on the job. The problem they are having is complex, and yet, you still want to assist them in order to make a good impression at work. Your ability to understand that perhaps transferring them to a coworker with more knowledge on the subject is the best way to provide the customer with a positive result.

Application Exercise:

It's important to be able to separate your own personal biases or self-interests when making decisions at work. Let's imagine your manager asks you to write down 10 reasons why you deserve a raise prior to an annual review. After you complete your reasons, read through each and *focus on identifying your own potential biases* that may impact your argument.

Awareness of these biases will help you generate a much stronger case for getting a raise.

So the next time someone starts talking to you about developing critical thinking skills for your career, hopefully now you will be able to tell them you know what they are, how they are used in the workplace and how to go about continually developing them for the future.

THANK YOU

SARAH ABDUL KAREEM