

What is critical thinking?

Analysis and reasoning well require critical thought. Through the process of critical thinking, we evaluate information, claims, and arguments, and develop the means to formulate and defend our own positions through logical argument. The assertion of a personal opinion is not an acceptable substitute for critical thinking. Moreover, a critical approach is not simply a negative evaluation, an attack, a finding of fault, or a complaint. Good critical thinking can also have a positive or ambivalent character. But more importantly, critical thinking entails moving beyond dualisms of positive and negative, to capture the complexities of knowledge and experience. The critical thinker is open to new ideas and interpretations, and to challenging one's own ideas, beliefs and values.

Critical thinking requires the asking of informed, analytic questions, and being prepared to engage with the analysis that is opened up through this questioning process.

To learn more about critical thinking, go to www.criticalthinking.org and click on 'Defining Critical Thinking', or go directly to:

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/aboutCT/definingCT.shtml>

Also see 'Critical Thinking for Students':

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/resources/articles/#Students>

On Writing

Writing is a process of critical reflection, and a means of making sense of the social. It is an active, dynamic process, one that keeps us deeply engaged with our topic, as it demands our full attention and participation. Through writing, we have the opportunity to engage in critical thinking, exploration, and possibly explanation. Moreover, writing aids memory, because the act of writing improves retention. So writing is an indispensable tool for learning in the academic context. However, writing is also one of the most demanding tasks that we undertake in university. The identification of an interesting idea to write about is only the starting point. Writing demands that we be able to communicate ideas clearly and effectively.

Scholarly writing should be clear, direct and grammatically correct. Your ideas will enjoy a better reception if they are expressed with clarity. These are the criteria that will be evaluated in your written work:

- a) grammatical sentence structure (i.e., syntax);
- b) clear and precise use of language (i.e., clear definition of terms when they are carrying meanings beyond those of vernacular usage);
- c) clear articulation of the theme (or problem) that the assignment addresses;
- d) coherent development of the argument advanced or the theme explored in your writing assignment (i.e., the use of explicit transitions from one idea to the next and the demonstration of the relevance of ideas discussed and points raised to the main theme, problem or argument);
- e) skilful marshalling of evidence;
- f) careful documentation of sources;

- g) illuminating interpretation of sources (through location of the source in relation to its social/historical context and through explication of the source's implicit meanings or the uncovering of its hidden assumptions, inconsistencies, or contradictions);
- h) insightful exposition of connections between and among readings, points or ideas;
- i) adherence to requirements of the assignment.

<i>On Time Management</i>

For more information on time management and other university survival skills, see: "Time Management for University Students: Tips to help you make the grade!" and "Time Management for University Students" at <<http://www.yorku.ca/cdc/lsp>>.

Appendix Four

(from Deborah Brock)