

Critical thinking summary

Introduction

Purpose

Thinking critically is a key skill for success at university. This means we actively question or test the information we access both to assess its validity and develop our own point of view.

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The purpose of critical thinking

If we want to make effective decisions or assess the validity of something, we need to develop the ability to find relevant information, evaluate the information in relation to our aims or requirements, and reach conclusions.

Reading critically

At its most basic, critical thinking is simply asking the right questions. When reading, you should ask who the author is and how they are qualified to offer a viewpoint. What are the key points/arguments? Do these seem credible? At a deeper level, you could analyse the arguments and supporting evidence, focusing on the quality and credibility of the arguments. Although you are trying to be objective, it is important that you compare these findings to your personal perspective as well so that you are able to question and develop your own views on the topic. The quality of an argument also relates to potential bias, unfair assumptions or beliefs, and misrepresentations.

Writing critically

Your goal as an academic writer is often to convince the reader and you achieve this by employing critical reasoning. Logical structure, clarity of expression, and use of appropriate support all contribute to the success of your writing. The starting point for this process is understanding the requirements of the assignment. As you write, you should apply the same process of evaluation that you use when you are reading. This helps predict potential weaknesses in your writing or reasoning.

Critical thinking in presentations

Effective presentations start with a clear purpose and understanding of the audience's needs. Consider the points in the previous sections on reading and writing but remember a presentation should engage an audience and sustain their interest in the topic.