

6.1

Thinking Critically

This resource page is taken from the Open University Skills for Study website:
<http://www.open.ac.uk/skillsforstudy/critical-thinking.php> (internal access only)

Critical thinking

Critical thinking is the process of applying reasoned and disciplined thinking to a subject. To do well in your studies you need to think 'critically' about the things you have read, seen or heard. Acquiring critical thinking skills helps you to develop more reasoned arguments and draw out the inferences that you need to use in your assignments, projects and examination questions.

These skills are essential if you want to obtain high grades in your university study and, like other skills, they improve with practice.

Ways to develop critical thinking

Critical thinking skills are essential requirements if you want to obtain high grades in your university study and, like other skills, they will improve with practice.

METHOD

HOW IT CAN HELP

Study in bite-sized chunks

Gives structure to your study time and provides regular opportunities to think critically about your learning materials and activities.

Pause for thought

Thinking is part of active learning. You need to pause at appropriate points to check that you understand what you are studying and revisit any parts you have found difficult. This is a good time to make some notes and add your own comments on the topic. Make sure that your comments are supported by evidence or reasoning.

Learn actively

Whatever learning activity you do or learning materials you use, make sure you actively and critically engage with the content.

Question what is being said

An essential aspect of critical thinking is to question what is being said. In academic study you must be able to justify a position or claim you make by reference to other sources of evidence.

Is the whole more than the sum of the parts?

To understand and critically evaluate learning materials you need to be able to analyze and interpret the content so you can identify the different parts and examine how they fit together as a whole.

Evaluating sources of information

The use of evidence is an important aspect of academic study. Critical thinking involves examining evidence and establishing its worth when compared with other evidence.

Think independently

Independent thought is important to critical thinking, especially at higher levels of study. You will be expected to evaluate and synthesize information from a variety of sources and present your own interpretation of the information, logically and coherently.

Make it count

Apply critical thought to your assignments, projects and examination questions. This is where your critical thinking skills really count. The higher grades at every level of university study require some critical analysis, reflection and evaluation.

Be objective

When you write assignments and projects, or answer examinations questions, think about whether you have been objective. Have you shown any bias or preference?

An essential part of critical thinking is self-reflection. When you receive an assignment back don't just look at the grade, think about the feedback and how you can build on it to improve your next assignment.

Work with other students

If you are not confident about your critical thinking skills, test them out in discussion with other students through tutorials, self-help groups and course forums.