

Promoting Critical Thinking

What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is a concept that can be difficult to define and even more challenging to teach. There isn't one consensus definition of critical thinking; however, it has been simply described by Richard Paul as, "thinking about your thinking".

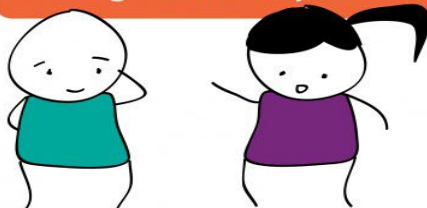
A Critical Thinker¹:

- ✓ **Raises vital questions** and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely;
- ✓ **Gathers and assesses relevant information**...effectively comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, **testing them against relevant criteria and standards**;
- ✓ **Thinks open-mindedly** ...**recognizing** and assessing, as need be, their **assumptions, implications, and practical consequences**; and
- ✓ **Communicates** effectively with others in **figuring out solutions to complex problems**.

Questions a Critical Thinker Asks

What's Happening?

Gather the basic information and begin to think of questions



Why Is It Important?

Ask yourself why it's significant and whether or not you agree



What Don't I See?

Is there anything important missing?



How Do I Know?

Ask yourself where the information came from and how it was constructed



Who Is Saying It?

What's the position of the speaker and what is influencing them?



If only time were relative...

What Else? What If?

What other ideas exist and are there other possibilities?



¹ Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools*, Foundation for Critical Thinking Press, 2008, <http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>



Try these strategies to support Year 5 student to develop critical thinking skills

- Ask Year 5 students strategic questions to uncover their thought processes. For example:

In a nutrition care placement

After a Year 5 student completes a nutrition assessment for a patient/client/resident, ask:

- What is happening with this patient?
- How did you know to implement that nutrition care plan? (prompt Year 5 student to justify his/her decision)
- What other possibilities might there be for the nutrition care of this patient?

In a management or population, public health placement

When discussing the approach to or the progress on a project, ask:

- What information do you have at this point in the project?
- What information might you still need?
- What sources did you gather this information from? (prompt Year 5 student to evaluate the source and credibility of information)
- What are the next steps in the project? Are there multiple options?

In the research module

When discussing how to proceed at various steps in the research project, ask:

- What have you learned about research already that informs your approach to this step of the project?
- What does the literature say that might inform our approach to this project?
- What information might you still need to develop the methodology for this project?
- How did you know to choose those statistical measures?

- Explain your critical thinking process to the Year 5 student for a particular patient/client/situation. Year 5 students can gain a lot of insight from hearing “how” you came to a decision, rather than just “what” you did in a particular situation.
- Suggest the Year 5 student create a mind map, and plan to have a discussion about the mind map once it is completed. The conversation can reveal how s/he is thinking about an issue or situation. Check out these [mind map resources](#).
- Continually prompt Year 5 students to integrate multiple sources of knowledge and ways of thinking. For example, when discussing a client with type 2 diabetes, consider asking:
 - What do you know about diabetes from your coursework? (Foundational knowledge)
 - What does the evidence say about nutrition care for type 2 diabetes? (Current evidence)
 - How do the diabetes nutrition recommendations translate into food choices? (Practical ‘know-how’)
 - What might we talk to the client about regarding his diabetes management? (Uncover assumptions/beliefs; identify ethical and patient-centered care considerations)

Where can I learn more about critical thinking?

1. [UBC Learning Commons](#) - videos, visuals, practical tips, and links to other resources
2. [Foundation for Critical Thinking](#) – definitions and history of critical thinking, lots of scholarly resources
3. [University of Toronto Scarborough Writing Centre](#) – brief hand out that provides examples of critical thinking