

Critical thinking

At university, you are often encouraged to be 'critical' in your thinking, reading and writing. Critical thinking aims to open up and challenge existing knowledge, rather than to reproduce it.

Critical thinking, reading and writing can simply be defined as considering more than one point of view or interpretation.

The word 'critical' is used differently in academic language than in everyday language. In academic language, it means 'questioning' or 'challenging' (as in 'critique'). When you think critically, it doesn't mean you have to find fault.

A critical approach is important so that you can:

- become more independent as a learner
- contribute to the scholarly rigor of your discipline
- contribute to the creation of knowledge
- achieve better marks.

How to think critically

This is one process you can follow to think or read critically.

1. Identify the important choices that have been made. For example, what is the author's point of view? What evidence do they offer? What methodology did the researcher choose? What type of action did they recommend?
2. Think of some alternatives to the choices that were made. For example, what other points of view are possible? What other evidence, methodologies or actions could have been used?
3. Reach your own position on the alternatives. For example, which point of view do you agree with? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the different methodologies or recommended actions?
4. Find some convincing evidence to support your point of view. For example, what books or articles support your view? What examples or data can you draw on to show that your view is convincing?