

Improving your critical thinking

Every day, a sea of decisions stretches before us. Some are small and unimportant, but others have a larger **impact** on our lives; for example, which **politician** should I vote for? Should I try the latest diet **craze**? Or will email make me a millionaire?

We're **bombarded** with so many decisions that it's impossible to make a perfect choice every time. But there are many ways to improve our chances, and one particularly **effective** technique is *critical thinking*.

This is a way of approaching a question that allows us to carefully **deconstruct** a situation, reveal its hidden issues, such as **bias** and **manipulation**, and make the best decision.

If the critical part sounds negative that's because in a way, *it is*. Rather than choosing an answer because it *feels* right, a person who uses critical thinking subjects all available options to **scrutiny** and **skepticism**.

Using the tools at their **disposal**, they'll **eliminate** everything but the most useful and reliable information. There are many different ways of approaching critical thinking, but here's one five-step process that may help you solve any number of problems.

1) Formulate your question.

In other words, know what you're looking for. This isn't always as **straightforward** as it sounds.

For example, if you're deciding whether to try out the newest diet **craze**, your reasons for doing so may be **obscured** by other factors, like claims that you'll see results in just two weeks.

But if you approach the situation with a clear view of what you're actually trying to **accomplish** by dieting; whether that's weight loss, better nutrition, or having more energy, that'll equip you to **sift** through this information critically, find what you're looking for, and decide whether the new **fad** really suits your needs.

2) Gather your information.

There's lots of it out there, so having a clear idea of your question will help you determine what's **relevant**. If you're trying to decide on a diet to improve your nutrition, you may ask an expert for their advice, or seek other people's **testimonies**. Information gathering helps you weigh different options, moving you closer to a decision that meets your goal.

3) Apply the information,

Something you do by asking critical questions. Facing a decision, ask yourself, "What **concepts** are at work?", "What **assumptions** exist?", "Is my **interpretation** of the information **logically sound**?"

For example, in an email that promises you millions, you should **consider**, "What is shaping my approach to this situation?", "Do I **assume** the sender is telling the truth?",

"Based on the evidence, is it **logical** to **assume** I'll win any money?"

4) Consider the implications.

Imagine it's **election** time, and you've selected a political **candidate** based on their promise to make it cheaper for drivers to fill up on gas. At first glance, that seems great.

But what about the long-term **environmental** effects?

If gasoline use is less restricted by cost, this could also cause a huge **surge** in air **pollution**, an **unintended consequence** that's important to think about.

5) Explore other points of view.

Ask yourself why so many people are **drawn** to the policies of the **opposing political candidate**.

Even if you disagree with everything that **candidate** says, exploring the full **spectrum** of viewpoints might explain why some policies that don't seem valid to you appeal to others.

This will allow you to explore **alternatives**, **evaluate** your own choices, and ultimately help you make more informed decisions.

This five-step process is just one tool, and it certainly won't **eradicate** difficult decisions from our lives. But it can help us increase the number of positive choices we make.

Critical thinking can give us the tools to **sift** through a sea of information and find what we're looking for. And if enough of us use it, it has the power to make the world a more **reasonable** place.

Vocabulary bank

impact - *noun* the striking of one body against another; a forceful consequence; a strong effect; influencing strongly; the violent interaction of individuals or groups entering into combat; *verb* press or wedge together; pack together; have an effect upon

politician - *noun* a person active in party politics; a leader engaged in civil administration; a schemer who tries to gain advantage in an organization in sly or underhanded ways

craze - *noun* a fine crack in a glaze or other surface; state of violent mental agitation; an interest followed with exaggerated zeal; *verb* develop a fine network of cracks; cause to go crazy; cause to lose one's mind

bombard - *noun* a large shawm; the bass member of the shawm family; *verb* address with continuously or persistently, as if with a barrage; throw bombs at or attack with bombs; cast, hurl, or throw repeatedly with some missile

effective - *adj.* existing in fact; not theoretical; real; able to accomplish a purpose; functioning effectively; exerting force or influence; producing or capable of producing an intended result or having a striking effect; works well as a means or remedy; ready for service

deconstruct - *verb* interpret (a text or an artwork) by the method of deconstructing

bias - *adj.* slanting diagonally across the grain of a fabric; *noun* a partiality that prevents objective consideration of an issue or situation; a line or cut across a fabric that is not at right angles to a side of the fabric; *verb* cause to be biased; influence in an unfair way

manipulation - *noun* exerting shrewd or devious influence especially for one's own advantage; the action of touching with

the hands (or the skillful use of the hands) or by the use of mechanical means

scrutiny - *noun* a prolonged intense look; the act of examining something closely (as for mistakes)

skepticism - *noun* doubt about the truth of something; the disbelief in any claims of ultimate knowledge

disposal - *noun* the act or means of getting rid of something; a kitchen appliance for disposing of garbage; the power to use something or someone; a method of tending to (especially business) matters

eliminate - *verb* kill in large numbers; terminate or take out; remove (an unknown variable) from two or more equations; remove from a contest or race; eliminate from the body; dismiss from consideration or a contest; do away with

straightforward - *adj.* pointed directly ahead; free from ambiguity; without evasion or compromise; without concealment or deception; honest

obscure - *adj.* not clearly understood or expressed; not drawing attention; not famous or acclaimed; marked by difficulty of style or expression; remote and separate physically or socially; difficult to find; *verb* make obscure or unclear; make difficult to perceive by sight; make undecipherable or imperceptible by obscuring or concealing; make less visible or unclear; make unclear, indistinct, or blurred

accomplish - *verb* put in effect; to gain with effort

fad - *noun* an interest followed with exaggerated zeal

relevant - *adj.* having a bearing on or connection with the subject at issue

testimony - *noun* something that serves as evidence; an assertion offering firsthand authentication of a fact; a solemn statement made under oath

concept - *noun* an abstract or general idea inferred or derived from specific instances

assumption - *noun* the act of taking possession of or power over something; the act of assuming or taking for granted; a hypothesis that is taken for granted; (Christianity) the taking up of the body and soul of the Virgin Mary when her earthly life had ended; celebration in the Roman Catholic Church of the Virgin Mary's being taken up into heaven when her earthly life ended; corresponds to the Dormition in the Eastern Orthodox church; audacious (even arrogant) behavior that you have no right to; a statement that is assumed to be true and from which a conclusion can be drawn

interpretation - *noun* an explanation of something that is not immediately obvious; a mental representation of the meaning or significance of something; an explanation that results from interpreting something; the act of interpreting something as expressed in an artistic performance

logic - *noun* reasoned and reasonable judgment; a system of reasoning; the principles that guide reasoning within a given field or situation; the system of operations performed by a computer that underlies the machine's representation of logical operations; the branch of philosophy that analyzes inference

sound - *adj.* thorough; free from moral defect; in good condition; free from defect or damage or decay;

consider - *verb* regard or treat with consideration, respect, and esteem; take into consideration for exemplifying purposes; think about carefully; weigh; show consideration for; take into account; judge or regard; look upon; judge; deem to be; look at carefully; study mentally; look at attentively; give careful consideration to

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pollution - *noun* undesirable state of the natural environment being contaminated with harmful substances as a consequence of human activities; the act of contaminating or polluting; including (either intentionally or accidentally) unwanted substances or factors; the state of being polluted

unintended - *adj.* not deliberate

consequence - *noun* having important effects or influence; the outcome of an event especially as relative to an individual; a phenomenon that follows and is caused by some previous phenomenon

drawn - *adj.* having the curtains or draperies closed or pulled shut; used of vehicles pulled forward (often used in combination); showing the wearing effects of overwork or care or suffering

oppose - *verb* be against; express opposition to; be resistant to; oppose with equal weight or force; set into opposition or rivalry; fight against or resist strongly; act against or in opposition to

spectrum - *noun* broad range of related values or qualities or ideas or activities; an ordered array of the components of an emission or wave

alternative - *adj.* necessitating a choice between mutually exclusive possibilities; pertaining to unconventional choices; allowing a choice; *noun* one of a number of things from which only one can be chosen

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eradicate - *verb* kill in large numbers; destroy completely, as if down to the roots

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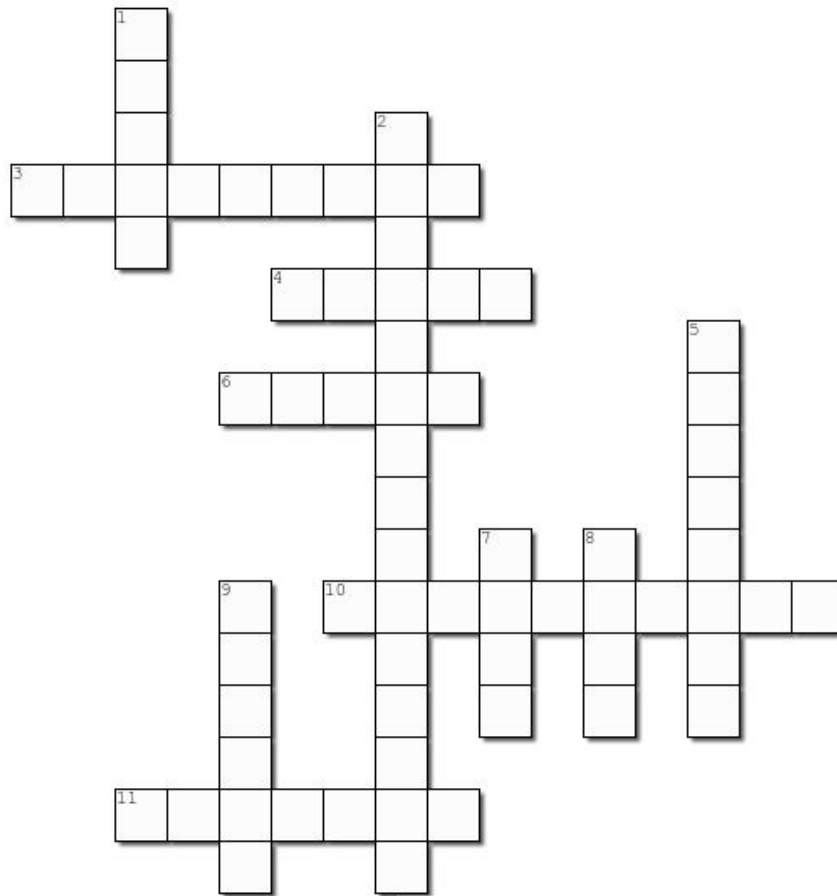
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Name: _____

Critical thinking



Created using the Crossword Maker on TheTeachersCorner.net

Across

- 3. remove
- 4. a new trend that is often short-lived
- 6. massive increase
- 10. somebody who works in government
- 11. unclear

Down

- 1. thinking about things in an objective way
- 2. obvious, easy
- 5. checking something thoroughly and properly
- 7. to go through information and sort the good from the bad
- 8. when something is designed to appeal to one group
- 9. to go against something