

Critical Thinking

University of New England
Biddeford and Portland, Maine
207-602-2443
Www.bit.ly/UNESASC

Student
Academic
Success
Center

Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is the ongoing search for valid and reliable knowledge to guide beliefs, decisions and actions. It seems more important than ever that students learn to think critically, because they are surrounded by information that has not been vetted by any authority, but must be evaluated by the consumer or learner. Developing and applying critical thinking skills requires practice.

Reading, Comprehension, and Literature

Successful students connect reading with writing and thinking. They see reading as an active process – they ask questions, make notes, summarize, and critique the material. They also know how to think critically, take and defend a position, and paraphrase a reading assignment. Students should come to the university with a familiarity in a range of world literature. They should be able to distinguish between different literacy forms (novel, play, poem, essay, and short story) as well as different genres (comedy, epic, tragedy, romance, and others).

Writing and Editing

Students need to learn grammar and to use proper sentence structure. They should understand how grammar helps to improve the effectiveness of communication. Students need to be able to write coherently, consider their audience, and support their ideas and arguments. Successful students know how to craft an outline before they write and edit their writing once a draft is complete. They should understand that all of these steps are critical in the writing process.

Information Gathering

Students should be able to not only take notes during a lecture, but to do more than create a transcript of what was said. They need to be able to take in the information, analyze it, and record what is meaningful. A lot of information gathering takes place outside of the classroom. Successful students should be able to create a research plan, be disciplined enough to carry it out, ask appropriate questions, and find reliable sources to answer those questions.

Analysis, Critique, and Connections

Students need to be able to think analytically about the information they collect. More specifically, they need to be able to categorize information by theme, go beyond the facts to make connections, move between the general and the specific, and to think comparatively. Furthermore, successful students know how to reflect critically. They accept constructive criticism, integrate their personal experiences into course material, and they assert their opinions and ask bold questions.

Orientation Toward Learning

Time management is crucial for success in college. Students should know how to budget the necessary time for reading and study. Students who participate in public discourse – reading newspapers and following world events – are ready to participate in academic discussions. To truly engage with their instructors, students need to move beyond the material presented in class. To fully discuss a piece of literature, students need to have a basic understanding of that work's place in history. Students need to be open-minded and consider a range of viewpoints. Successful students exhibit a willingness to push ahead, apply themselves, and work hard.

Critical Thinking Tips:

State the problem in a clear way
Identify the alternative views
Watch for fallacies in reasoning
Find at least 3 different answers
Construct your own reasonable view
Be aware of your mind-set
Be willing to say, "I don't know."
Practice tolerance
Understand different points of view
Understand before criticizing
Emotions get in the way of clear thinking
Examine the source

Generate alternatives
Think of possibilities
Create solutions to problems
Create new ideas
Use more of your potential
Ask "Why?"
Be curious about the world
Look at many possibilities or alternatives (divergent thinking)

Source: The Main Idea, College Knowledge, Jossey-Bass, 2008