

What is Critical Thinking?

Introduction

University of Leeds (2021) explains that critical thinking means not accepting what you read or hear at face value. Yet questioning the information and ideas presented and ensuring there is valid evidence to support the argument. Also, questioning and learning with an open mind.

Critical thinking skills are vital in all aspects of life. Cottrell (2017) suggests that most people with practice, can develop their critical thinking skills.

Research

An important part of academic study is reading and researching different sources to expand on information already taken from lectures (Cottrell, 2008). Doing research can help strengthen a student's understanding of a specific subject and generate new ideas. Furthermore, it is important to evaluate what a student is reading and make sure it has valid evidence to support it. Does the premiss support the conclusion? (Cottrell, 2011). Being critical and making sure to only research credible resources will help this. In addition, being able to reference where a student has taken information from is important as not doing so could be construed as plagiarism. Being able to reference correctly is essential in academic writing as it shows a student has credible evidence to support their work (Godfrey, 2013).

Conclusion

To conclude, it is evident from the available literature that having an open minded approach in regards to research and being critical and asking yourself questions about what is in front of you can make a student a more confident critical thinker (Reynolds *et al*, 2013). Taking notes, engaging in research and having good time management when combined can help a student develop and better their critical thinking skills and therefore make better decisions in their academic studies and in life.

Time Management

A major factor of time management is being organised (Williams and Reid, 2011). They suggest that writing out to do lists, making a timetable and keeping a diary can help manage a student's workload efficiently. However, it is important to be realistic and be mindful that life can get in the way. Many people will often procrastinate or have other commitments, such as jobs, family, friends and placements. It is important to remember that to be able to achieve good time management skills there are methods that can be undertaken to make it easier. Donaldson-Feilder (2018) recommends setting goals. Firstly, establishing what a student might want to achieve and secondly, ensuring to plan realistically in order to achieve these goals. Furthermore, Donaldson-Feilder (2018) goes on to explain about prioritising what is most important in order to succeed and re-evaluate the goals and ensure they are achievable. In addition, Cottrell (2008) states that using a journal properly can be effective and help with progression in reflective learning and time management skills.

Note Taking

Note taking can be beneficial in helping a student's understanding of information they are reading or being presented with. As a student taking notes is a good way of keeping records of lectures and is useful to reference back to. In addition, making notes helps a student understand and then paraphrase information they have researched (Godfrey, 2013). Queen's University Belfast (2011) advises to keep notes concise and critical. They suggest to only write down key information and avoid writing everything word for word. There can be positives to writing down notes and it is beneficial to read over them after lectures to help better a student's understanding. There are many note taking techniques that can be used, Vollmer (2017) suggests using the Cornell method. This is when you split your notes into two columns, focussing on prompts, keywords, questions and ideas. Later try and expand on that information, give more context and make note of any evidence. They then advise to write a summary of your notes as this can help a student think critically about a subject.

Reference List

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