Critical Thinking

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INTRODUCTION

In today's multimedia World, we are bombarded by information from a wide range of sources, much of which may reflect differing facts, views, and opinions. In some cases, we may be presented with total untruths masquerading as fact.

To eliminate potential confusion or bias, we must adopt a critical thinking approach.

It could be suggested that critical thinking is an essential tool in navigating our own society.

Cottrell (2017, p. 2) suggests that critical thinking equips an individual with the skills to consider whether the information is reliable, credible, or valid. There are many factors that may influence our interpretation of information, such as considering different opinions and whether the views expressed are sensible and sufficiently evidenced. When weighing up arguments an unbiased approach should be adopted.

You would expect therefore that the aspiring academic would adopt a solid 'Critical Thinking' approach. This may include:

- Not accepting information at face value.
- Considering several opinions and views.
- Seeking correlation and authenticity of the information provided/opinions expressed.

To achieve these aims, the Critical Thinker may adopt the following study tools:

- Time Management
- Note Taking
- Reflection

TIME MANAGEMENT

The University of Sheffield (2020), states that one of the key skills required by a studying academic may be that of managing one's time.

Time management is setting out a programme ensuring that sufficient allowance is made to achieve the completion of all required tasks. A good balance between study time and other necessary commitments is often required. Time management should not just include work/study, but also should allow sufficient downtime, (Leisure, family, social). Where possible, the programme should be dynamic in making allowance for the unexpected.

Furthermore, McMillan (2021, pp. 24-29) suggests that the keeping of a diary/timetable/planner will allow students to monitor upcoming events and deadlines for academic work. Daily lists with an order of priority will keep track of what actions are required on any day. They will also allow more involved work to be scheduled at more productive hours, taking advantage of short study spells perhaps whilst travelling.

The importance of good organisation and having a set plan would also be beneficial.

Avoid procrastination!

Source: Cottrell, 2019

NOTE TAKING

As opined by Microsoft (NO DATE) an individual's mind is an unreliable, inconsistent assistant that can not always be relied upon. Everyone has accidentally forgotten that exciting light bulb moment! Good note-taking is a potential strategy to avoid this eventuality.

According to McMillan (2021, p. 66), university teaching is predominantly delivered within a lecture room environment. Often there is a large amount of information to be absorbed and retained by the student. To aid memory and to provide easier recall, taking notes by different means appears common practice. McMillan (2021, p. 68) also stated that there are three note-taking methods:

- Taking notes in written form.
- Utilising laptops and other digital media devices.
- Note-recording apps.

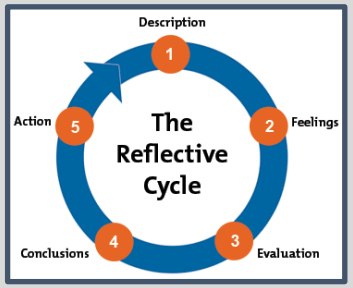
When taking notes in any form, it is important not to try and record everything but to filter and retain only those items critical to the content. Often topic areas of note are emphasized, repeated, and highlighted by the lecturer and/or resources. Similarly, having an organised note-taking process/system would be beneficial when reading later.

Referring to Burns and Sinfield (2012, pp. 164), effective note-taking allows you to retain, comprehend and sort data. It is highlighted to be one of the most powerful skills you may practice as an academic. "A good notemaking system also saves you TIME" (Burns and Sinfield, 2012, p. 164)

REFLECTION

Within an academic setting, students will complete a variety of subject tasks. In these scenarios, it would be expected that an element of reflection takes place. It would be unusual to look back and not find some areas for improvement.

Cottrell (2021, p. 269) tells us that reflection is a normal reaction. At times, we all revisit our actions and thoughts wishing we could reconsider our initial approach and what the alternative could have been or even whether we had it correct the first time.



Source: Mind Tools (2022)

Reflection is a mind skill hopefully addressing a clearer comprehension of past events. We are not always pleased to uncover our inner selves and any weaknesses thereof. When the reflective process is in action, we find out things that make us feel uneasy and would prefer to point the failure to another. Although to our detriment, these are often things we need to know most.

It would appear that reflection does not come easy to many, but when mastered, perhaps helps produce a fair-minded and well-rounded individual.

CONCLUSION

One would hope that critical thinking would naturally form part of all interactions and debates between parties. However, undertaking a task such as this suggests this may not always be the case. It is far too easy for judgment to be clouded by personal or life experiences.

In essence, a good rule to follow would be to "question everything and validate!" Notwithstanding this bold statement, nevertheless one has to consider the reality.

Source: Ms Elliot's Library (2017)

As defined by the National Council for Excellence in Critical Thinking (1987), all types of critical thinking are never common to a single person. All of us are prone to spells of wild or unjustified thoughts.

The three chosen elements within this academic poster, address some of the skills needed to be a competent critical thinker. Time management, note-taking, and reflection all have a part to play but are by no means exclusive.

There are many other skills that contribute to the critical thinker's ability. However, these three attributes were selected for inclusion in this document as they could be considered as being significant.

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