

Module Title: Academic Skills and Critical Thinking

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Assignment Title: The Importance of Critical Thinking for Academic Success

Student Name: Andreea Sibel Ismail

Student Number: 2516748

Lecturer: Sukhpreet GREWAL

Contents

Introduction	3
Defining Critical Thinking	3
Critical Thinking and Academic Achievement	3
Critical Thinking Beyond the Classroom.....	3
Developing Critical Thinking through Reflection and Curiosity.....	4
Constraints to The Practice of Critical Thought.....	4
Conclusion.....	4
Reference List.....	5

Introduction

Learning at a university hinges on more than the acquisition of knowledge; it also requires the capacity to synthesise, critique, and construct meaning autonomously. Critical thinking facilitates the transformation of knowledge into understanding and equips learners with the tools to arrive at reasonable and well-founded conclusions. It nurtures contemplation, inquisitiveness, and the desire to delve beneath the surface. The forthcoming report captures the essence of critical thinking, its significance to scholarship, and the role of reflection and curiosity in its ongoing cultivation.

Defining Critical Thinking

Critical thinking entails the drawing of a substantiated opinion. It incorporates thinking and reasoning in its description. Ennis (2018) articulates it as “reasonable, reflective thinking focused on deciding what to believe or do.” Such accounts suggest its fusion with reasoning to verify all conclusions rather than assume them. Furthermore, Facione (2020) characterised critical thinking as a self-guided and self-disciplined process, the essence of which is to promote reasoning on issues and advocate for the advancement of intellectual integrity.

Basically, critical thinking incorporates, and goes well beyond, the posing of questions. What is the evidence for this position? What is being overlooked? The formulation and answering of such questions encourages the active evaluation of information, and to not passively accept it as truth surrounding documents. Active engagement with information is the hallmark of independent thought and rational scepticism.

Critical Thinking and Academic Achievement

Critical thinking is fundamental to academic learning. Cottrell (2023) describes the importance of thinking analytically and integratively pertaining to real cognitive gains and not just learning by rote. Cottrell identifies two critical thinking characteristics—the ability to integrate diverse theories and provide unique perspectives.

Brookfield (2022) illustrates the importance of critical thinking in writing by describing how it enables one to shift from mere description toward a balanced evaluation of a piece of writing and supporting the evaluation with reasoned arguments. Personally, I have been involved in strengthening the argument by assessing varied viewpoints and building on the argument.

Critical thinking, in the context of abundant information online, assists learners to make rational and ethical academic choices by differentiating scholarly, dependable materials from substandard and unreliable resources.

Critical Thinking Beyond the Classroom

Critical thinking, like other cognitive skills, lies at the base of personal advancement and integration into the workforce. According to the World Economic Forum (2023), critical thinking and problem solving skills rank high on the list of skills needed for the future of work. They help employees meet

and respond to challenges, arrive at well-considered conclusions, and work within, and navigate, different contexts of communication.

In the workplace, a critical thinker upholds the values of equity and fairness, and applies rational judgement. In some professions, for example, healthcare and business, professionals need to discern relevant and irrelevant information. They must do this at the time of their decision making to provide optimal outcomes for their patients or clients. Budgets, conflicts, media, and other everyday tasks require clear thinking and responsible and rational action.

Developing Critical Thinking through Reflection and Curiosity

The role of critical thinking in academic achievement cannot be overstated. Cottrell (2023) points out that genuine learning involves not merely recall, but reasoning and integration of seemingly disparate ideas.

According to Brookfield (2022), critical thinking in composition allows students to progress beyond mere description and achieve measured assessment, as well as justification and balance. For my part, perspective taking has enabled me to sharpen my reasoning.

In instances of an information excess, critical thinking equips students to identify authentic academic materials, to eliminate irrelevant ones, and to arrive at rational and moral conclusions.

Constraints to The Practice of Critical Thought

Despite the significance of uninterrupted focus and reasoning, it can be challenging to practice consistently. This phenomenon is noted in research by Halpern (2019) who states that students assume that thinking quickly equates to intelligent reasoning and are unaware that real thinking requires reflective reasoning, time, and patience. Social expectations, excessive control, and reliance on other people's thoughts can all reduce singular thinking and reasoning. Activating discourse in the class can help students shift from a passive to an active role in learning.

Conclusion

The importance of critical thinking in higher learning and personal growth cannot be overstated. It helps learners challenge assumptions and consider the relevance of evidence in making reasoned judgments. It is through curiosity and reflection that learners go beyond rote memorisation and achieve understanding and intellectual autonomy. These skills transcend the university context and equip learners to address problems, articulate their thoughts, and respond morally in multifaceted situations. For learners like me, perhaps the most significant reason critical thinking is of cardinal importance is that it defines, in practice, how we learn, how we work, and how we interact with the world.

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