

**Research-** gather information necessary for you to make an informed decision - narrow down the subject - use a variety of resources - make sure the source of information is valid

**Determine your Options-** systematically gather and explore alternative solutions. A major decision seldom has one solution. Look beyond the obvious, think outside the box, examine details and explore all possibilities. Break the problem up into smaller pieces. Be careful in this stage not to let your emotions take over the thought process. You do not have to eliminate emotions from your thoughts, but it is crucial that you know when your emotions are clouding an issue. If you feel that your emotions caused you to be less than objective, you might consider the following tips when you are faced with an emotional decision: Listen to all sides, identify which emotions are causing you to lose objectivity, be cautious that your emotions do not withdraw you from the situation, stay away from "I'm right, you're wrong" situations, try to understand why the other person feels they are right, watch for increased heart rate and blood pressure (may need to take time out to remain focused on keeping an open mind), go into the situation with a positive outlook, and determine if your emotions are irrational. Weigh the evidence - ask all the "what ifs".

**Take Action** - your action will be based on informed critical thinking - review your decision and consider all the consequences.

### Cornerstones for Critical Thinking

- ◆ Strive for objectivity in thought, action, and decision making.
- ◆ Reserve judgment until all the facts are known.
- ◆ Seek truth, even if the answers are painful and unpopular.
- ◆ Use only credible and reliable sources for research.
- ◆ Ask questions.
- ◆ Do not assume - research.
- ◆ Avoid rigid, concrete thoughts; strive for flexibility in thinking.
- ◆ Use emotional restraint.
- ◆ Work hard to identify fact from opinion.
- ◆ Avoid generalizations.

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#### Resources Used

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Practicing College Learning Strategies, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Carolyn H. Hopper, 2004, Houghton Mifflin Publishing Company, pp 37-44.

Cornerstone - Building on Your Best, Montgomery, Moody, & Sherfield, 1999, Allyn & Bacon Publishing Company, MA.

<http://www.accd.edu/sac/history/keller/ADDCitg/SSCT.htm>, Strategies for Success - Critical Thinking.

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## Pathways to College Success



# Critical Thinking

## Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is thoughtful, systematic, and careful examination of ideas (Meltzoff, 1998). Thinking critically improves the ability to learn to retain new information. It may change your mind on a subject or enable you to back-up what you believe. It also means "thinking deeper, being skeptical, questioning strongly held beliefs, or taking no information or opinion for granted" (Bacon, 1999).

### Blooms Hierarchy of Thinking Skills

- ◆ **Memorization (Knowledge)** - Learn course concepts and facts - determines the pool of facts and ideas that give you the tools to make a sound decision - identify facts and rehearse them until you can recall them easily - Cramming for a test only reaches this level.  
**Related skills** - recognize - recall - recite - define - describe
- ◆ **Comprehension** - Show understanding of course concepts and facts - understand new concepts and correct interpretations.  
**Related skills** - restate - explain - interpret - discuss - summarize - defend
- ◆ **Application** - Extend course concepts and facts in new directions - see how you can apply what you have learned to different situations - process in less time and retain information longer.  
**Related skills** - classify - apply - produce - discover - modify - prepare
- ◆ **Synthesis** Create new organizations of ideas - integrate ideas - analyze interconnections - draw conclusions

- ◆ **Analysis** - Break ideas apart and relate to other ideas - take apart and study how its parts are related - this skill contributes to your effectiveness in reasoning and asking questions - time and place to use the information - what works better.

**Related skills** - compare - contrast - connect - relate - categorize - analyze - summarize information.

**Related skills** - design - organize - construct - compose - revise - develop

- ◆ **Evaluation** - Make well-reasoned judgments and decisions - form a conclusion or judgment - something's worth - the ability to evaluate often depends on the other thinking skills - the key to making decisions and offering criticism.

**Related skills** - recommend - judge - critique - decide - evaluate - support

### Characteristics of Good Critical Thinkers

- ◆ practice honesty, acknowledge what they do not know,
- ◆ recognize their limitations and are watchful of their own errors.
- ◆ regard problems and controversial issues as exciting challenges.
- ◆ strive for understanding, keeping curiosity alive, remain patient with complexity, and are ready to invest time to overcome confusion.
- ◆ recognize that extreme views (whether conservative or liberal) are seldom correct, so they avoid them, practice fair-mindedness and a balanced view.
- ◆ practice restraint, controlling their feelings rather than being controlled by them, and thinking before acting.
- ◆ base judgments on evidence rather than personal preferences, deferring judgment whenever evidence is insufficient and revising judgment when new evidence reveals error.
- ◆ show interest in other people's ideas and willingness to read and listen attentively, even when they tend to disagree with the other person.

### Fact or Opinion

- ◆ **Fact**: a statement that can be proven, verified, or checked for accuracy.
- ◆ **Opinion**: a statement that is an evaluation based on a personal judgment or a belief that may or may not be verified - there is no proof.

**Use the following guidelines to help you decide whether it is fact or opinion.**

- ◆ Ask questions and listen for solid proof and documentation to support the statement.
- ◆ Listen for what is not said in the statement.
- ◆ Be careful not to be swayed by those that you assume are loyal and trustworthy.
- ◆ Don't let those that you consider untrustworthy sway you toward the negative - have an open mind.
- ◆ If you are still unsure as the credibility of the source, assume it is an opinion.

### The Process of Decision Making

- ◆ **Identify the problem** - exactly what is the problem, why is it a problem, who is affected by the problem and, what type of problem is it.