

CRITICAL THINKING ATTRIBUTES

- asks pertinent questions
- assesses statements and arguments
- is able to admit a lack of understanding or information
- has a sense of curiosity
- is interested in finding new solutions
- is able to clearly define a set of criteria for analyzing ideas
- is willing to examine beliefs, assumptions, and opinions and weigh them against facts
- listens carefully to others and is able to give feedback
- sees that critical thinking is a lifelong process of self-assessment
- suspends judgment until all facts have been gathered and considered
- looks for evidence to support assumption and beliefs
- is able to adjust opinions when new facts are found
- looks for proof
- examines problems closely
- is able to reject information that is incorrect or irrelevant

FACT, OPINION AND INFERENCE

Being able to distinguish between a statement of fact, an opinion or an inference is an important skill to critical thinking. It involves knowing what can be proven directly, what is a legitimate implication derived from the facts, and what is fair to conclude.

Historians, for instance, typically interweave statements of fact, inferences they derive from the facts, and statements of their own opinion into a seamless historical narrative. Critical thinkers must be able to distinguish among these three types of communication.

- **FACT:** reports information that can be directly observed or can be verified or checked for accuracy.
- **OPINION:** expresses an evaluation based on a personal judgment or belief which may or may not be verifiable.
- **INFERENCE:** a logical conclusion or a legitimate implication based on factual information.

Generally, facts are constants in historical study. But a compendium of facts is inevitably incomplete and deathly dull to read. Historians construct history by closing the gaps in their knowledge about the past, enlarge our understanding, and enliven their narrative by drawing logical inferences from their assembled facts. Often, they then use their expertise to arrive at a considered judgment about the wisdom or significance of past decisions and events.

Distinguishing statements of fact, opinion, and inference may at first seem difficult to do. That is because they are often closely interwoven.

Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally. It includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking. Someone with critical thinking skills is able to do the following :

- understand the logical connections between ideas
- identify, construct and evaluate arguments
- detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning
- solve problems systematically

- identify the relevance and importance of ideas
- reflect on the justification of one's own beliefs and values

Critical thinking is not a matter of accumulating information. A person with a good memory and who knows a lot of facts is not necessarily good at critical thinking. A critical thinker is able to deduce consequences from what he knows, and he knows how to make use of information to solve problems, and to seek relevant sources of information to inform himself.

Critical thinking should not be confused with being argumentative or being critical of other people. Although critical thinking skills can be used in exposing fallacies and bad reasoning, critical thinking can also play an important role in cooperative reasoning and constructive tasks. Critical thinking can help us acquire knowledge, improve our theories, and strengthen arguments.