

Critical Thinking: Attitudes & Skills

In the everyday sense of the word, 'critical' has negative connotations. But at university, *critical thinking* is a valuable process of understanding different points of view, and evaluating their strengths and weaknesses so you can respond appropriately. The ability to think critically is something you learn by developing specific attitudes and skills.

Attitudes

Engaging with the arguments of others involves an attitude of 'open-mindedness'. You need to be:

- Open-minded willing to consider other points of view
- Flexible willing to change your own point of view
- Persistent follow a line of inquiry to its logical conclusion
- Sensitive respect diverse opinions and cultural differences

Skills

Critical thinking requires the ability to 'read between the lines' in order to:

- analyse and evaluate an **argument**
- distinguish between **facts and values**
- identify and question underlying **assumptions**
- clarify **definitions**
- consider **alternative** points of view
- recognise various **reasoning processes**
 - Generalisations *It is a well known fact that women love shopping.*
 - Predictions *This has been the warmest decade on record, therefore global temperatures will continue to rise.*
 - Causal claims *The more firefighters attend a fire, the bigger the fire is, so firefighters cause increased fire size.*

You should use the same skills to reflect on your own thinking processes. In other words, be aware of your own reasoning and logic. Recognise the values and assumptions that **you** hold when interpreting arguments and when formulating your own arguments.