

What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is a way of thinking in which we assess our thinking, while we are thinking, with the goal of improving the quality of our thinking. It is the deliberate or mindful application of universal intellectual standards — such as clarity, relevance, accuracy, precision, breadth, depth, logicalness, completeness, significance, fairness, etc — to our thinking process, as we are engaged in thinking. While all humans naturally think, most of us don't tend to naturally think critically, so our thinking can be unhelpful or even harmful to ourselves and others. Critical thinking is an art and a skill that can be learned and practiced like any other skill, and the persistent pursuit of which can help us become well-cultivated thinkers and lead us to live better lives.

How is the conception of critical thinking presented here different from conceptions of critical thinking that I have previously encountered?

This is the first and only conception of critical thinking that I've come across. It is the first and only one I've seen that clearly articulates the elements of thought, universal intellectual standards, and intellectual virtues, and that treats the practice of critical thinking as a pursuit of excellence in "fair minded" or ethical thinking. The conception here provides more depth, meaning, and structure to my previously hazy ideas of "critical thinking", as well as ideals to aim for when it comes to thinking.

Write briefly about how you can begin to apply this module's content to your daily life.

The main takeaways from this module for me were the elements of reasoning, the universal intellectual standards, and the intellectual traits. To put this knowledge in practice, first I plan on developing more awareness of my thinking while I'm engaged in thinking (e.g., at work) and consciously making note of the various components of my own thinking (for e.g., "why would we do this?" -> purpose, or "this will increase expenditure" -> implication/consequence); and secondly, by remembering to apply at least one of the universal intellectual standards to my everyday thinking (e.g., "the purpose needs to be clarified", or "the question of cost is irrelevant here").

Write a little about yourself: your name, title, school or professional affiliation, your motivation for taking this course, and what you hope to learn in it

My name is Shobit (pronounced show-bit). I'm from Mumbai, India, but I've spent the last decade living in Seattle, WA, where I work as a software engineer at Amazon.com.

Lately, I've been contemplating how to live life well, and I've come to realize that good thinking is one of the core foundations for a life well-lived. When I decided to actively look for resources to help me improve my thinking, the first Google search result was the website of the Foundation for Critical Thinking which led me to YouTube videos by Dr Richard Paul. I thought I would

benefit more from participating in a more structured course, working with others on this path. This is my primary motivation for taking this course.

I'm hoping to learn tools that will help me assess and improve my own thinking (e.g., learning how to ask better questions), and opportunities to practice and apply the tools and skills such as through coursework so that thinking critically becomes second nature eventually.