

# CRITICAL THINKING FOR ENGLISH, HUMANITIES AND THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Critical thinking skills are used to varying degrees in all types of careers. When you encounter a new problem, you are forced to approach it **critically**, meaning that you must rely on your ability to think independently and to ask and answer questions.

➤ **BEFORE DOING ANYTHING:**

1. Make sure you understand *all* aspects of a problem or question before tackling it. Don't rush in!
2. Be *strategic* – design a plan of action before doing hours of work. Misdiagnosing a situation can lead to hours of wasted time.

➤ **BE SURE TO KEEP THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN MIND AS YOU WORK:**

1. **Questions of Clarification:**

What do you mean by X?

Could you give me an example of X?

2. **Questions that Probe Assumptions:**

What are you assuming?

Is that *always* the case?

Why do you think that assumption holds here?

3. **Questions that Probe Reasons and Evidence:**

Why do you say that?

What other information do we need?

Is there good evidence for believing that?

Is there reason to doubt that evidence?

4. **Questions about Viewpoints or Perspectives:**

How would other groups/types of people respond? Why?

Can anyone see this in another way?

What might someone who disagrees say to that?

How are Ken and Roxanne's ideas alike/different?

5. **Questions that Probe Implications and Consequences:**

When you say that, are you implying \_\_\_\_\_?

What effect would that have?

Would that *necessarily* happen or only *probably* happen?

6. **Questions About the Question:**

How can we find out?

Is the question clear?

Do we understand the question?

Can we break the question down into smaller elements?

What does this question assume?

Why is this question important?

➤ **BEWARE OF ERRORS IN PERCEPTION:**

1. **Selective Perception:** looking only for evidence that supports your opinion.

Example: Let's say that you are trying to prove that Dawson students are smarter than Vanier students. If you only look at grades from departments that support your point, and ignore all other departments, you are not being objective.

Solution: Be objective. Look for many points of view. Do not ignore facts that don't support what you want to prove.

2. **Gullibility and Skepticism:** believing everything or being skeptical of everything.

Solution: Ask questions and demand answers (either from yourself or from others.)

3. **Bias toward the majority or the minority:** always favoring a position because it comes from the majority or the minority.

Example: Supporting a political party simply because it is doing badly in the polls, or simply because it is leading in the polls, is a biased form of decision-making. This process does not take into account facts about the relative strengths and weaknesses of each of the parties.

Solution: Decide issues based on their merits.

4. **Either/or Thinking:** taking only extreme positions on issues.

Example: If medicine cannot be *entirely* public it must be *completely* privatized.

Solutions: Ask yourself if in-between positions can exist in the argument.

➤ **BEWARE OF ERRORS IN JUDGMENT:**

1. **Double Standard:** using one standard of judgment for your own ideas and more demanding standard for the ideas of others.

Solution: Use a consistent standard of judgment.

2. **Over-generalizing:** making sweeping statements that are not grounded in evidence.

Example: "People are just like that."

Solution: Be sure that you have evidence to support or defend your conclusion, then keep searching.

3. **Oversimplification:** simplifying a subject by omitting information.

Solution: When simplifying an idea, avoid distorting it.