Critical thinking is a process through which one solves problems and makes decisions. It is a process that can be improved through practice, though never perfected. It involves self-discipline and structure. Sometimes it can make your head hurt, but sometimes it comes naturally. I believe for critical thinking to be its most successful, it must be intertwined with creative thinking.

Kathryn Haines
Grade 5

Thinking critically gives me an organized way of questioning what I hear and read in a manner that goes beyond the surface or literal thought. It assists me in structuring my own thoughts such that I gain greater insight into how I feel and appreciation for the thoughts of others, even those with which I disagree. It further enables me to be less judgmental in a negative way and to be more willing to take risks.

Patricia Wiseman
Grade 3

Critical thinking is being able and willing to examine all sides of an issue or topic, having first clarified it; supporting or refuting it with either facts or reasoned judgment; and in this light, exploring the consequences or effects of any decision or action it is possible to take.

Kim V. DeVaney
Facilitator, WAITS

All of us think, but critical thinking has to do with becoming more aware of how we think and finding ways to facilitate clear, reasoned, logical, and better-informed thinking. Only when our thoughts are backed with reason and logic, and are based on a process of careful examination of ideas and evidence, do they become critical and lead us in the direction of finding what is true. In order to do this, it seems of major importance to maintain an open-minded willingness
to look at other points of view. In addition, we can utilize various skills which will enable us to become more proficient at thinking for ourselves.

Nancy Johnson
Kindergarten

Critical thinking is a necessary access to a happy and full life. It provides me the opportunity to analyze and evaluate my thoughts, beliefs, ideas, reasons, and feelings as well as those of other individuals. Utilizing this process, it helps me to understand and respect others as total persons. It helps me in instructing my students and in my personal life. Critical thinking extends beyond the classroom setting and has proven to be valid in life other than the school world.

Veronica Richmond
Grade 6

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze and evaluate feelings and ideas in an independent, fairminded, rational manner. If action is needed on these feelings or ideas, this evaluation motivates meaningfully positive and useful actions. Applying critical thinking to everyday situations and classroom situations is much like Christian growth. If we habitually evaluate our feelings and ideas based on a reasonable criteria, we will become less likely to be easily offended and more likely to promote a positive approach as a solution to a problem. Critical thinking, like Christian growth, promotes confidence, creativity, and personal growth.

Carolyn Tarpley
Middle School
Reading

Critical thinking is a blend of many things, of which I shall discuss three: independent thinking; clear thinking; and organized Socratic questioning.

As for the first characteristic mentioned above, a critical thinker is an independent thinker. He doesn't just accept something as true or believe it because he was taught it as a child. He analyzes it, breaking it down into its elements; he checks on the author of the information and delves into his or her background; he questions the material and evaluates it; and then he makes up his own mind about its validity. In other words, he thinks independently.

A second criterion of critical thinking is clarity. If a person is not a clear thinker, he can't be a critical thinker. I can't say that I agree or disagree with you if I can't understand you. A critical thinker has to get very particular, because people are inclined to throw words around. For example, they misuse the word 'selfish.' A person might say: "You're selfish, but I'm motivated!" A selfish person is one who systematically ignores the rights of others and pursues his own desires. An unselfish one is a person who systematically considers the rights of others while he pursues his own desires. Thus, clarity is important. We have to be clear about the meanings of words.

The most important aspect of critical thinking is its spirit of Socratic questioning. However, it is important to have the questioning organized in one's mind and to know in general the underlying goals of the discussion. If you want students to retain the content of your lesson, you must organize it and help them to see that ideas are connected. Some ideas are derived from basic ideas. We need to help students to organize their thinking around basic ideas and to question. To be a good questioner, you must be a wonderer — wonder aloud about meaning and truth. For example, "I wonder what Jack means." "I wonder what this word means?" "I wonder if anyone can think of an example?" "Does this make sense?" "I wonder how true that is?" "Can anyone think of an experience when that was true?" The critical thinker must have the ability to probe deeply, to get down to basic ideas, to get beneath the mere appearance of things. We need to get into the very spirit,
the “wonderment” of the situation being discussed. The students need to feel, “My teacher really wonders; and really wants to know what we think.” We should wonder aloud. A good way to stimulate thinking is to use a variety of types of questions. We can ask questions to get the students to elaborate, to explain, to give reasons, to cite evidence, to identify their points of view, to focus on central ideas, and to raise problems. Socratic questioning is certainly vital to critical thinking.

Thus, critical thinking is a blend of many characteristics, especially independent thinking, clear thinking, and Socratic questioning. We all need to strive to be better critical thinkers.

Holly Touchstone
Middle School
Language Arts

Critical thinking is wondering about that which is not obvious, questioning in a precise manner to find the essence of truth, and evaluating with an open mind.

As a middle school teacher, critical thinking is a way to find out from where my students are coming (a way of being within). Because of this “withinness” produced by bringing critical thinking into the classroom, student motivation will be produced. This motivation fed by fostering critical thinking will produce a more productive thinker in society.

Thus, for me, critical thinking is a spirit I can infuse into society by teaching my students to wonder, question, and evaluate in search of truth while keeping an open mind.

Malinda McCulston
Middle School
Language Arts, Reading

Critical thinking means thinking clearly about issues, problems, or ideas, and questioning or emphasizing those that are important to the “thinker.” As a teacher, I hope to develop Socratic questioning so that my students will feel comfortable discussing why they believe their thoughts to be valid. I hope that they will develop language skills to communicate with others and that they will be open to ideas and beliefs of others.

Jessie Smith
Grade 1

The spirit of critical thinking is a concept that truly excites me. I feel the strategies of critical thinking, implemented appropriately in my classroom, can enable me to become a more effective teacher. By combining this thinking process with my sometimes overused emotions and intuitive power, I can critically examine issues in my classroom as well as in my personal life. I feel it is of grave importance for us as educators to provide a variety of opportunities for our students to think critically by drawing conclusions, clarifying ideas, evaluating assumptions, drawing inferences, and giving reasons and examples to support ideas. Also, Socratic dialogue is an effective means of enabling the students to discover ideas, contradictions, implications, etc., instead of being told answers and ideas given by the teacher. Critical thinking is an excellent tool for the teacher to help the students learn how to think rather than just what to think. Hopefully critical thinking will help me be a more effective teacher as well as excite my students.

Beth Sands
Middle School
Language Arts

Critical thinking is what education should be. It is the way I wish I had been taught. Although I left school with a wealth of facts, I had never learned how to connect them or to use them. I loved learning but thought that being learned meant amassing data. No one ever
taught me how to contrast and compare, analyze and dissect. I believed that all teachers knew everything, all printed material was true and authority was always right. It took me years to undo the habits of “good behavior” in school. I want to save my students the wasted time, the frustration, the doubts that I encountered during and after my school years. And teaching and using critical thinking is the way to do that.

Nancy Poueymire
High School
Language Arts

For me, critical thinking is a combination of learning and applying a data base of learning to evaluate and interrelate concepts from diverse academic disciplines. Critical thinking is understanding that knowledge, wisdom, and education are not divided into math, science, English, etc. It is the fairness of tolerance combined with a strong sense of ethics and morals. It is the fun of feeling your mind expand as you accomplish intellectual challenges that attain your own standards. It is the zest of life.

Joan Simons
High School
Biology

Both as teacher and individual, I find critical thinking skills essential elements of a full and enjoyable life. With the ability to think critically, one can both appreciate and cope with all aspects of life and learning. When dealing with problems, from the most mundane to the most complex, the ability to think critically eliminates confusion, dispels irrational emotion, and enables one to arrive at an appropriate conclusion. At the same time, as we ponder the beauty and creativity of our environment, we are free to “wonder” and enjoy the complexity around us, rather than be perplexed or intimidated by it, because we have the mental capability to understand it. To live is to be ever curious, ever learning, ever investigating. Critical thinking enables us to do this more fully and pleasurably.

Mary Lou Holoman
High School
Language Arts

A critical thinker never loses the joy of learning, never experiences the sadness of not caring or not wondering about the world. The essence of the truly educated person is that of being able to question, inquire, doubt, conclude, innovate. And beyond that, to spread that enthusiasm to those around him, obscuring the lines that divide teacher and student, enabling them to travel together, each learning from the other.

Jane Davis-Seaver
Grade 3

Critical thinking is a means of focusing energy to learn. The learning may be academic (proscribed by an institutional curriculum or self-directed) or non-academic (determined by emotional need). It provides a systematic organization for gathering information, analyzing that information, and evaluating it to reach reasonable, acceptable conclusions for yourself.

Blair Stelson
Elementary
Academically Gifted

Critical thinking is the ability to reason in a clear and unbiased way. It is necessary to consider concepts or problems from another’s point of view and under varying circumstances in
order to make reasoned judgments. Awareness of one’s own reasoning processes enables one to become a more fairminded and objective thinker.

Karen Marks
Elementary
Academically Gifted

Critical thinking is questioning, analyzing, and making thoughtful judgments about questions, ideas, issues or concepts. It refines thoughts to more specific or definite meanings. The critical thinker must be an active listener who does not simply accept what he/she hears or reads at face value without questioning, but looks for deeper meaning. Critical thinking also involves evaluating the ideas explored or problems addressed and better prepares a student to be able to think about the world around him or her.

Becky Hampton
Grade 6

Critical thinking has given me a broader means of evaluating my daily lesson plans. It has helped me better understand the thinking principles of each student I teach. It has also enabled me to practice strategies in lesson planning and to become a more effective classroom teacher.

Pearl Norris Booker
Grade 2

Critical thinking provides me the opportunity to broaden the thinking process of my students. It can be used to have the students reason and think about different ideas of a problem or a given situation.

Portia Staton
Grade 3

Critical thinking is a process that takes all the ideas, questions and problems that we are faced with each day and enables us to come up with solutions. It is the process by which we are able to search for evidence that support already existing answers, or better yet, to come up with new solutions to problems. Through critical thinking, one begins to realize that many times there is more than one solution whereupon decisions can be made. To me, critical thinking has helped and will continue to help me understand myself and the world around me.

Debbie Wall
Grade 4

Critical thinking is a skill that involves the expansion of thoughts and the art of questioning. This skill must be developed over a period of time. It is a way of organizing your thoughts in a logical sequence. Knowledge is gained through this process.

Carolyn Smith
Grade 5

Critical thinking is questioning, analyzing and evaluating oral or written ideas. A critical thinker is disciplined, self-directed, and rational in problem solving. Reaching conclusions of your own rather than accepting everything as it is presented, is internalizing critical thinking.

Denise Clark
Grade 2

To think critically, one must analyze and probe concepts or ideas through reasoning. It makes one an active reasoner, not a passive accepter of ideas (or facts). It turns one into a doer, an evaluator, or re-evaluator. Critical thinking occurs everywhere, is applicable everywhere and
while it can be tedious, need not be, because as one thinks critically, new ideas are formed, conclusions are drawn, new knowledge is acquired.

Janell Prester
Grade 3

Critical thinking means to think through and analyze a concept or idea. You are able to back up your reasoning and think through an idea in a manner which allows an over-all focus. If a person is a critical thinker, a yes-no answer is too brief. An answer to a problem or idea must have an explanation and reasoning backing it.

Donna Phillips
Grade 4

Critical thinking is a tool that teachers can use to offer a new dimension of education to their students: that of thinking about, questioning and exploring the concepts in the curriculum. When critical thinking is an integral part of the teaching-learning process, children learn to apply thinking skills throughout the curriculum as well as in their daily lives. Socratic dialogue fosters critical thinking and motivates the teacher and learner to share and analyze experiences and knowledge. Critical thinking involves the child in the learning process and makes education more meaningful to the individual, thus facilitating learning.

Andrea Allen
Grade 1

The most important part of critical thinking, to me, is discovery. We discover a deeper level of thinking. We discover the reasons for ideas instead of just accepting ideas. We are motivated by action, interaction, and involvement. We discover we have the ability to expand our thoughts to include all aspects and perspectives of our beliefs.

Mandy Ryan
Grade 5

Critical thinking, to me, is the process of analyzing new and old information to arrive at solutions. It's the process of learning to question information that you may have taken for granted. It's being independent. Critical thinking is letting people think for themselves and make judgments for themselves.

Leigh Ledet
Grade 4

Critical thinking is the process of taking the knowledge you have gained through past experience or education and re-evaluating conclusions on a certain situation or problem. Because students must evaluate the reasons for their beliefs, they become actively involved in learning through the teacher's use of Socratic questioning. Allowing students to clarify their reasons through the writing process further stimulates the students to become critical thinkers. The ultimate goal for students to understand in using critical thinking is to become active thinkers for themselves.

Robin Thompson
Middle School
Language Arts

Critical thinking, to me, is to be open-ended in my thoughts. It is like opening a door which leads to many other doors through which ideas may evolve, move about, change, and come to rest. It is like a breath of freshness in which one can gain new insight over long-established opinions. It stimulates and generates endless new possibilities.

Eutha M. Godfrey
Grades 2-3
Critical thinking is thinking that demonstrates an extension of an idea or concern beyond the obvious. A critical thinker's values are significant to his learning.

Frances Jackson
Grade 2

To me, critical thinking means independence. It gives me a tool which lets me explore my own mind extending beyond basic recall to a higher level of reasoning. I then feel more in touch with myself and my own inner feelings. This results in my becoming a better decision-maker.

Jean Edwards
Grade 5

Critical thinking is the process of working your mind through different channels. It is the process of thinking logically. Critical thinking is analyzing your thoughts through questions. It is the process of seeing that your ideas and concepts may not be the same as another's. It is opening your mind to those who have different views and looking at their views.

Cathy L. Smith
Grade 3

Critical thinking is to question in-depth at every possible angle or point of view, to look at someone else's point of view without making hasty judgments. Critical thinking is to logically and fairly re-orient your own personal point of view, if necessary. To think critically, you are self-directed in your thinking process, as well as disciplined.

Mary Duke
Grade 1

Critical thinking is the vehicle by which I encourage students to become active participants in the learning process. I allow more time for and become more aware of the need for students to express ideas verbally and in written form to clarify ideas in their own minds. I recognize the importance of developing skills for analyzing and evaluating. Ultimately, once students become comfortable using critical thinking skills, they assume greater responsibility for their learning.

Dora McGill
Grade 6

Critical thinking is clear, precise thinking. I believe that all human actions and expressions, in some way involve thinking. For example, I believe that feelings, emotions and intuitions are much the results of earlier thought (reactions) to stimuli. I think that this, in one way, explains the variations of emotional responses in some people to similar stimuli. Thus, I believe that critical thinking not only has the potential to clarify new and former conscious thoughts but also to effect/change likely (future) emotive and intuitive reactions/responses.

More concrete and less theoretical outcomes of critical thinking may be more relevant to me as an educator. Better questioning skills on the part of the students and the teacher are an obvious outcome. There seem to be several positive outcomes of better questioning; more opportunity for in-depth understanding of content, a natural (built-in) process for accessing the effectiveness of lessons, and more opportunity for student participation, self-assessment, and direction are three apparent outcomes. There are, of course, many other outcomes of developing better questioning skills, and from the other skills of critical thinking.

I simply believe that critical thinking improves the overall integrity of the individual and the collective group, class, school, community, etc.

Richard Tuck
High School
Art
I perceive critical thinking in teaching as a tool for my learning. As I attempt to develop the critical thinker, I will become more aware of the students’ thoughts, values, and needs. I must learn from what students offer, and develop acceptance and sensitivity to the individual. The knowledge I gain from the student will determine what I utilize as strategies or principles of critical thinking.

Loretta Jennings
Grade 1

Critical thinking is the ability to look at a problem or issue with a spirit of openmindedness and to take that problem and analyze or evaluate it based on the facts or good “educated” hypotheses. Critical thinking is being flexible enough to suspend one’s bias towards an issue in order to study all sides to formulate an opinion or evaluation.

Mark Moore
Grade 4

Critical thinking to me involves mental conversations and dialogues with myself. I try first to establish the facts. Then I try to search for criteria to examine my “facts.” The next question is whether or not there are distortions and irrelevancies. I have to examine whether I have a personal bias which has led me to select only certain facts and leave others out.

I then try to mentally list facts and arguments on both sides of a question and, finally, draw logical questions and conclusions.

Barbara Neller
Middle School
Social Studies

Critical thinking is a systematic, logical approach to life in which an individual, using this method, truly learns and understands a concept rather than imitates or mimics. Knowledge and intellectual growth are achieved by a variety of strategies which include examining a variety of viewpoints, making assumptions based on viable evidence and forming well thought out conclusions.

Jane S. Thorne
High School
Math

Critical thinking allows students to become active participants in their learning. Socratic dialogue stimulates communication between teacher and students, thus creating an atmosphere where everyone is encouraged to become risk-takers. A teacher needs to become a model of critical thinking for the students. Through this interaction, content can be analyzed, synthesized, and evaluated with thinking.

Carol Thanos
Grade 6

Critical thinking is the complex process of exploring an issue, concept, term or experience which requires verbal as well as non-verbal involvement from the participant. It involves listing ideas related to the subject, so that the person involved could objectively examine the relationship of the ideas thought of. It demands the person involved in the process to investigate the certain issue, concept, or process from varied vantage points, in order that intuitions, assumptions, and conclusions are presented with reasoned opinions or experienced evidences. Critical thinking is a task that involves the participant's in-depth assessment of his or her body of knowledge, experience and emotions on the subject in question.

Ariel Collins
High School
Language Arts
Critical thinking is thinking that is clear, fairminded, and directed. It is not sloppy or self-serving thinking, but deep and probing thought aimed at finding the truth. It is skillful thinking aimed at genuine understanding, not superficial head-shaking. It is the tool used by and descriptive of an educated person whose mantra would be "veritas."

Helen Cook
Middle School
Science

Critical thinking is a process of questioning and seeking truth and clarity. It is a continual endeavor as one is constantly exposed to new knowledge which must be reconciled with prior conclusions. As one's body of knowledge grows, it is all the more important to be able to critically consider and determine what is truth.

Critical thinking demands certain prerequisites: openmindedness, willingness to withhold snap judgments, commitment to explore new ideas. The development of such qualities empowers me to participate in the various facets of critical thinking, e.g., clarifying ideas, engaging in Socratic discussions. These skills are not nearly so difficult as achieving the mind-set which must precede them. Only a commitment to question and persevere and honestly pursue truth will supply the impetus necessary to delve beneath the surface of issues and concepts. Yet this predisposition is difficult to achieve, because it necessitates taking risks, making mistakes, being wrong and being corrected — activities very threatening to our safe ego boundaries.

Only in transcending these ego boundaries does growth occur and genuine learning transpire. Critical thinking is comprised of a sense of wonderment, daring and determination. It is undergirded by a value of truth and personal growth. It is the continual learning process of the individual.

Deborah Norton
High School
Social Studies

The definition of critical thinking that I now hold is one that explains some things that I have felt for some time. I am convinced that everything that I know, that is a part of my education, I have figured out or found for myself. I have had close to twenty years of formal, didactic education, but I could tell you very little about anything that was presented to me in lecture through all those classes, except perhaps some trivia. In college, I did my real learning through the writing that I did, either from research or from contemplation. I have felt that this was true, but a lot of my own teaching has continued to be didactic and students have learned to be very accepting and non-questioning and to expect to be told what the right answer is, what someone else has decided the right answer is. I hope that I can change that now. I now feel that it is imperative that my students learn to be critical thinkers, and I hope that I can model that belief and, through all my activities in class, lead them in that direction. We all need to be open-minded, to realize that there are often many sides to a problem, many points of view and that there are strategies and techniques for analyzing, making decisions, and making learning our own. I want to be, and I want my students to be, questioning, open-minded, fairminded, synthesizing individuals — in other words, critical thinkers.

Liza Burton
High School
Language Arts
Logical thinking to gain insights. It is stimulating thinking, questioning and exploring ideas, values, beliefs, and truths. It is making judgments, developing a sense of fairmindedness and long-term learning.

Sandra Hunter Atkins

Critical thinking is a process which an individual can use to obtain information, analyze what is said, critique (think about it) and then determine it’s truth. Critical thinking is a higher form of decision making. The process allows a person to continually delve, probe, ask, re-ask, question, and re-question other’s views. Critical thinking is a thought process that is usable in many facets of life.

Rosa L. Jones
Mineral Springs Elementary
Assistant Principal

In my opinion, critical thinking means breaking issues into fractionated parts which will be dealt with through critical eyes accordingly. Critical thinking also means not taking ideas and opinions for what they are and accepting them, but challenging each and every aspect of the given idea or opinion.

Lizzie Morrison
Hill

Critical thinking means looking carefully at the world around you and analyzing what is observed in order to make decisions when choosing the best course of action for your next goal. It is important to use when interacting with others around you (friends, relatives, co-workers) if you want to have a satisfying relationship with them.

As a teacher, I would like to help students see the importance of thinking critically by using critical thinking strategies on a regular basis in the classroom. The content area being taught, then, would thus be used in more than one way: to help students learn to analyze those facts in light of their own experiences, and to apply thinking skills in their own lives.

Carol Tirrell
Old Richmond Elementary
Reading Coordinator

Critical thinking is thinking at a deeper level because you are analyzing your thoughts with the objective of improving how you handle life’s challenges.

Janice Tomlinson
Whitaker
Reading Coordinator

Critical thinking means being able to critique or evaluate reasons that are given to me, making sure that I remain openminded and fairminded.

Robyn G. Martin
Southwest Elementary
1st Grade

To me critical thinking means considering a viewpoint (thought or action) from many angles, analyzing and evaluating its strengths and weaknesses within the framework of the values of critical thinking.
I have learned through this workshop to evaluate reasons, “to think about my thinking in order to make my thinking more clear, precise, accurate, and fair.” I have learned to control bias and to think before I form an opinion, thereby looking at all aspects of an issue and evaluate the reasons for the issue.

Ollie Hutchens
Assistant Principal
Sedge Garden Elementary

Critical thinking is a way of interpreting, classifying, and using the abundance of information and experiences that we are confronted with. A person must sort relevant and non-relevant information. Then, he must synthesize this new information with previous knowledge, thus enriching or altering his existing knowledge base. Finally, he must use this altered knowledge base when dealing with new situations.

Connie Prevatte
Easton
Reading Coordinator

Critical thinking is your brain shifting gears as needed to evaluate evidence, read between the lines, see other's points of view, etc. It is knowing when to sift through information and when to emphasize certain facts over others. It is knowing when to look at the surface and when to go beyond and question deeply. Critical thinkers know when to generalize to transfer knowledge to other areas.

Myrna Wheeler
Mineral Springs

Critical thinking is the ability to reasonably explore all aspects before making judgments. It's the ability to look beyond the obvious when exploring ideas. Open minds are more apt to be critical thinkers. Looking at information and carefully pulling out the relevant applies to the critical thinker. Patience in relation to conclusions is crucial as not to rush our opinions and ideas.

Karen Ranson
Children's Center

I believe that critical thinking is a process of interpreting, analyzing, and applying information that an individual is exposed to. The learner begins to look at information trying to evaluate it using information gained through past experience. He tries to see how it can be applied to other situations. He begins to question his beliefs, as well as the beliefs of others, and then alters his own thinking as he experiences more. He must try to filter out information and experiences that do not have a direct bearing on the situation at hand.

Bobby Stern
Hall-Woodward School
2-3rd Grade

Critical Thinking is the process of being able to take basic concepts and problems and apply them to everyday problems in math.

Liz Clark
Paisley Middle School
Math

Critical Thinking is evaluating information and basing thoughts and actions on those evaluations.

Rena Hill
Kernersville
Critical thinking is a rational way of thinking about things and acting upon them.

Dorothy Williams
Grade 5

Critical thinking is the process by which one takes power over their own learning. Instead of being a passive recipient of information, the student makes judgements as to what she thinks is relevant. The student uses her own knowledge base to draw comparisons, and if new insights occur, they are tested against what is known to see if the insight is still viable. Critical thinkers are involved.

The implications for the classroom - We as teachers often pre-digest information by classifying, throwing out irrelevant data, isolating particular tasks to attain specific goals in the shortest amount of time possible. We do not give the student the time to collect data, decide what is relevant, discuss, analyze, and reach their own conclusions. Students are expected to come to the same destination point without having made the journey. The challenge for the teacher, who believes in the value of critical thinking, is to make the time for learning despite pressures to cover pages in texts. As one educational reformer has stated, “Teaching less is more.” We need to teach for knowledge that will be internalized rather than information that is only held in short term memory until the test is completed.

Karen Marks
Academically Gifted

Critical thinking, in the broadest sense, is the individual pursuit of a responsible existence - the search for a path - to act instead of react. In learning, it is also the search, the questioning and the way that broadens our minds, not just the answer. As we explore critical thinking and identify it for ourselves, we find that the questions far out-number the answers and that the path goes in every direction!

Terry Edwards
Kindergarten

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze and critique information. It is the ability to evaluate objectively one’s own thinking and then question the outcome. It is reflective thinking.

Pam Lowry
Middle School
Social Studies

Critical thinking includes: listening, questioning, analyzing, comparing, contrasting, restating, trying ideas in new and different ways – this is in part what it means to think critically. A critical thinker is one who does not accept ideas or information without checking – going to other sources—experimenting, questioning, asking for examples of information – one who tries to remember that they may bring to a new learning situation fears, prejudice, and bias and who tries to keep those old ideas at bay in order to at least consider new possibilities.

Linda Denmark
Grade 1

A good critical thinker uses skills, dispositions, and content in different ways depending upon the context. Skills – the ability to use them, the willingness to do so, and the perception of when and how to use them – are important, but not, I think, the most crucial element. Skills are usually testable and can be isolated – comparing and contrasting, recognizing an assumption – and they can be used either critically or non-critically. One can think in a “weak” sense using only skills.
Dispositions or attitudes are, to me, the basis of "strong" sense critical thinking. The willingness to listen — really listen to another point of view — fairmindedness, and moving away from egocentricity are more difficult to accomplish and internalize than learning thinking skills. The triangle needs all three aspects — but dispositions should be heavily emphasized because they are more difficult to internalize.

Finally, one cannot think critically in isolation; one must have content to think about. It may well be that certain skills, such as observing, vary from context to context. In other words, observing in science and observing closely in reading literature may be different; they may be "domain specific". In practical terms, I think this means we infuse critical thinking into all aspects of the curriculum. It is not an "ad on" or a series of worksheets and activities.

Jan Williamson
Facilitator, WATTS

Critical thinking seems to be, in essence, taking charge of one's thoughts and thinking for oneself rather than just accepting at face value what "seems to be". It is facilitated by practiced interpreting, and looking at different points of view. With knowledge becoming quickly obsolete, the notion of "becoming educated" by gaining knowledge must be replaced by the concept of an educated person as one who is proficient as a thinker, a seeker, a questioner.

Nancy Johnson
Kindergarten

I have been asked to describe critical thinking several times before, but I am not sure that I can yet give a definition. Critical thinking is, in a way, a state of mind — an open state of mind in which "teacher" and "student", or perhaps, I should say, participants, enter into research and dialogical discussion to try to understand and assimilate various points of view. Critical thinkers try to see issues from different points of view and are constantly modifying their own conceptions and looking deeper and in various directions. This philosophy calls for very little "right answer" type of teaching and encourages students to probe, to question, to try new things, and not to be afraid of making mistakes. In my classes, I encourage students to learn from each other, to enter into discussions with students with differing points of view and differing backgrounds. I believe that small group learning is among the best ways to learn.

Liza Burton
High School
English

Critical thinking is asking provocative questions, wanting to consider answers and possibilities, an atmosphere of openness and possibility of humor. It is also paradoxical thinking — being able to hold ambiguity, but also being hard-nosed, careful, thorough, detailed. Critical thinking is analysis, synthesis, and evaluation — seeing relationships, analysis, new terms, thinking about thinking, being aware of one's process, organizing, finding a variety of solutions.

Nancy Osborne
High School
English

Critical thinking is the ability to suspend one's judgment until all sides of the issue are studied. One must verify the facts in order to render a judgment.

Mark Moore
Academically Gifted
Critical thinking actively involves the learner in the thinking and learning process. Students don’t truly learn by the following method: teacher lecture, student absorption, student regurgitation. Students learn by “hands on”, active participation. Critical thinking activities allow students to participate actively, freely discuss their ideas, ask questions, and gain ownership of the information covered in lessons.

Dale Russell
Grade 2

Critical thinking is the process in which acquired knowledge is applied to new problems/situations in order to devise new solutions. By applying knowledge to solve new problems, higher order thinking takes place, and often creative thinking is implemented into the process. Creative thinking means going beyond standard ways of thinking and becoming limitless in creating solutions. By using critical and creative thinking, one is more flexible in accepting new knowledge because of the opportunity to “bounce things (ideas) around” in one’s mind more. The use of Socratic dialogue and questioning, as well as writing, are essential tools in the implementation of both critical and creative thinking processes.

Robin Thompson
Middle School
Sixth Grade

Critical thinking means: As a teacher, to become a questioner so that students learn for themselves. To have students doubt and question what I say – to interact on each other’s ideas – not to just memorize. To be able to start the lesson with questioning that opens the students’ minds – that causes them to want to know why it is important to know certain information. To see the value of experiences and the value of what they are studying, to enjoy class and not want to miss for fear of losing out on information they want to learn.

Sheila May
High School
Business

What does critical thinking mean to me? Critical thinking is the ability to put new information into an old framework. No information is independent. It can be linked to something. Can you identify the thing or things that this new information relates to, and why? For example, can you fit the idea of a mathematical variable into a number line, or anything, for that matter? Does it help your idea of a number line or does it confuse you and why? Can you use this tool and why or why not?

Bob Fish
High School
Mathematics

Critical thinking is an active process of learning and decision making. Critical thinking should be utilized not only in the classroom but in all aspects of life. In critical thinking the thinker takes knowledge that he knows and uses it to question, evaluate, compare, contrast, etc. in order to solve a problem. The critical thinker should be willing to question and ask why. Critical thinkers will more readily internalize solutions/decisions because of their active participation.

Becky Berry
Jefferson

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Critical thinking is autonomous thinking: thinking for oneself, thinking independently. It is also the ability to analyze, to make things better, clearer. As a teacher I can encourage my students to brainstorm or argue ideas among themselves. They can exercise independent judgement in the classroom. I need to help them assemble information, analyze, synthesize, formulate and draw conclusions whenever possible.

Jeannene Caesar
Bolton Elementary
3rd Grade

I am a firm believer that we are raising children who tend to be passive and lazy "thinkers". I use the term “thinker” loosely because we as adults have reduced our decision making to Chicken Sandwich or Hamburger? Marriage or Singleness? Any thought processes that involve more time are too much of an effort. What can we expect of our young ones when we model inappropriate behaviors?

Critical thinking involves getting your feet wet. Explore all the sides of issues. Do not stick to what is convenient and easy. You are not looking for argumentation, you are looking for educational awareness.

Lynn Anton
Vienna Elementary
4th Grade

For me, critical thinking means being intentional. I think about my thoughts and expression of my thoughts (written, oral, artistic, or nonverbal) in such a way that my behavior results in an expanded view of the world and clearer understanding of my role in the world.

Terry Jones
Walkerton

In the classroom, critical thinking is discovery. It is each student discovering meaning for himself. As this is done, he internalizes the information so that it can be applied in his life. The strategies and techniques that a teacher employs facilitate the critical thinking of their students.

Carolyn McKinney
Kernersville

Critical thinking is the increased ability to question, weigh, and analyze information which we receive and must process.

Peggy M. Davis
Brunson Elementary

Critical thinking is a method used to gather, process, and/or disseminate information. It is a necessary process that can be used as a consumer, patient, spouse, friend, and citizen.

Valerie Clark
Speas Elementary School
Assistant Principal

Critical thinking involves discussion which takes time. It cannot be rushed. It involves asking questions which foster more questions. A simple yes/no answer is not sufficient in critical thinking. One must wonder why the answer to a question is correct. The true answer must always be explained further and sought through by analyzing and searching continuously.

Yvonne M. Woodward
Middle School
Language Arts
Critical thinking is thinking more deeply. It involves reasoning logically and analyzing, organizing, examining and questioning information to attain several possible answers rather than focusing on finding just the correct answers! Because we live in an information-saturated era, it is imperative that each student’s educational experience provide opportunities to practice and develop the ability to think critically.

Jean Botzis
Middle School
Social Studies

Critical thinking involves probing one’s own ideas (or one suggested by others) beyond the initial expression of that idea. By asking questions about ideas, one digs deeper into an issue, opinion, or statement, and begins to expand those thoughts. Critical thinking gives clarity to ideas and opens the mind to new avenues. Searching and questioning in the classroom allows for the sharing of individual thoughts. Expressing these thoughts often helps students form new ideas, or expand on thoughts that take on new meaning. An example might be to look at a special topic, for instance: “What it means to live under a democratic form of government.” Encourage students to share how they feel about the “pros and cons” of this subject. Being able to listen to the thoughts of others and respond to them in kind, can broaden one’s scope.

Critical thinking causes students to actively form their own concepts. Asking “discovery” questions causes students to “think” of an answer. This method adds self-confidence as one begins to form real ideas in one’s mind. Critical thinking can be taught by questioning others for the purpose of bringing out ideas.

Alice Newell
Grade 3

Critical thinking is a process which allows one to question the validity as well as the understanding of information obtained. It enables one to establish a point of view upon which to analyze information received. It also encourages one to develop and utilize one’s own thought processes in any given situation.

Yvonne Hunt
Middle School
Reading

Critical thinking is an analyzing process in which the brain begins to encourage one to question, comprehend, and digest a situation, thought, or idea. Critical thinking is a skill to be learned, developed and practiced. After practicing critical thinking, it becomes more automatic and natural. Critical thinking can be fostered through writing, discussing, and constructive arguing.

Donna Rickard
Middle School
Mathematics

Questioning is the first word that comes to mind when I think of critical thinking. As I question or my students question we analyze the material which we are discussing in such a way as to determine its usefulness to us. We need to be able to weed out or through material to determine what is important. We need to be able to determine how what we have learned can be applied to other similar situations. For example, will learning “Word Perfect”, the way we are learning it, be of value to students in two or three years? That word processing program will be out of date by then. Will the students be able to take what they know and fairly easily transfer this knowledge to another word processing program?
Critical thinking is not accepting what someone says as gospel but analyzing, critiquing, questioning, synthesizing that information to determine if it is reasonable for them.

Gayle Nelson
High School
Business

Critical thinking is a process in which we consider all alternatives, use logic, consider different viewpoints, erase prejudice, and listen actively.

Mary Mayer
Brunson
School Counselor

Critical thinking is the ability to question, evaluate, connect things, analyze, select, pattern, make judgements about information in the broadest sense and to take risks so that universal issues implicit in school content and in life are internalized in a manner that results in greater effort in living for the greatest good.

Jane Pfefferkorn
Cultural Arts Specialist

Critical thinking for me is a process of examining and restructuring information in a way that has meaning and can be of use. This process is one by which the essence of meaning can be derived, hence, clarity is either gained or increased. The process involves critical listening and questioning in order to arrive at the desired goal. Critical thinking goes across the curriculum where education is concerned and enhances the quality of life when implemented outside the classroom.

Minnie Hewitt
Reading Coordinator
Forest Park School

Critical thinking is empowering students to be responsible for their own learning. Critical thinking is a process leading students to think in new ways, think about how they think, and take an active role in learning. Critical thinking uses stratagem which make students draw on their experiences, examine their values, and come to conclusions. Critical thinking is an active activity stretching the person to his limits and desiring to go further.

Lib Raymer
Forest Park
5th Grade

Critical thinking is using strategies of thinking to enable one to make life decisions in such a way that one feels competent and confident after the decisions are made.

Brenda Furches
Northwest Middle

To me, critical thinking means approaching a problem or a question logically, considering the various components or consequences of a solution or decision before arriving at one. It means not making snap judgments, but carefully and thoughtfully weighing facts and implications before taking action.

Since critical thinking applies to both personal life and to our concern today, I'd like to briefly consider both. In my personal life, critical thinking allows me to exercise patience in dealing with other people, and to make careful decisions about how I spend my time and money. At school, I
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would try to teach critical thinking for this reason also – to help students better deal with other people – to be aware of the consequences of their behavior before they act. Obviously, the need for critical thinking as related to academics must be realized, too. But for the middle schools, I see the more immediate recovery in inter-personal relationships.

Nancy Reid
Northwest Middle

Critical thinking is taking the information you have experienced, and applying it to questions, techniques, and reasonings to solve everyday life situations and problems that arise.

E. Hodges
Philo Middle School

What is critical thinking? It is the ability to think at a higher level: the ability to discriminate between knowledge known and not known, so that known knowledge can be reinterpreted in different frameworks. For example, Einstein, Darwin, and Newton originated world-changing theories by discrimination of knowledge and reinterpretation of it.

Joan C. Simons
High School
Biology

Critical thinking is an on-going process of expanding one's mind into the awareness of why and how we react to events in our life. When we go through our days with little critical thought, we are reacting to events in patterns of habit, like robots. Humans have highly developed minds with which to think. Critical thinking allows us the possibility of controlling our reactions instead of following pre-programmed reactions without thought. When a person is faced with a new situation where there is no set pattern of old reactions, he is forced to think critically about the situation. We as humans need to apply the critical on-going thinking not only to new situations, but also to old patterned reactions. Critical thinking will improve our relationship to the entire realm of our existence when applied, because it will involve us with new events and restructure old events and patterns. Every facet of our lives will be touched: emotional, physical, and mental.

Barbara Lampley
Grade 1