Critical thinking skills

- **Identify the line of reasoning in the text** – what argument is it making? What point of view is it expressing?
- **Critically evaluate the line of reasoning**
  - Does it contain relevant, contributing and sufficient propositions (reasons)?
  - Does it contain logical progression?
  - Does it contain false premises?
  - Does it contain flawed reasoning?
- **Questioning surface appearances and checking for hidden assumptions or agendas**
  - Is the evidence what it appears to be?
  - Might there be other explanations apart from the obvious one?
  - Has all necessary information been given, or might other details lead to a different conclusion?
  - Are there interested parties who would gain if the conclusions were accepted?
  - Are there hidden assumptions or agendas?
  - Does the evidence come from a reliable, disinterested source?
- **Identifying evidence in the text**
  - Evaluating the evidence according to valid criteria
  - Date
  - Source
  - Check for bias
  - Beware statistics and numbers:
    - most/many
    - Percentages
    - Sample size
    - Representativeness
    - Conditions of data collection
    - Emotive language and persuader words
- **Identifying the writer’s conclusions**
- **Deciding whether the evidence given supports these conclusions**

The main points which characterise criticism are:

- agreeing with, or defending a position, or confirming its usefulness through an evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses;

- conceding that an existing approach or point of view has some merits which can be useful, but that others need to be rejected;

- focusing on ideas, theories and arguments and not on the author of those arguments, so as to produce careful, considered and justified evaluation;

- being aware of your own critical stance; identifying your reasons for selecting the work you have criticised and recognising the weaknesses of your critique;

- selecting elements from existing arguments and reformulating them to form a synthesis: a new point of view on some subject matter;

- finding fault in an argument by identifying fallacies, inadequacies, lack of evidence or lack of plausibility;

- identifying errors in a criticism made by another to provide correction and balanced criticism thereby advocating the usefulness of the original work and reasons for rejecting the criticism made of it.


Additional sources:


Try typing phrases like "critical thinking" or "research methods" into NuSearch