

MOUNT VERNON NAZARENE UNIVERSITY

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WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

“Critical thinking is the art of analyzing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it”
(Paul & Elder, 2009).

Critical thinking involves a cultivated approach to learning and excellence in thought. It requires that we go above and beyond our existing knowledge to consider new information and alternative viewpoints. When we arm ourselves with sufficient information about a concept or idea, we can demonstrate proper judgment, reasoning, and understanding. Critical thinking is an intellectual trait that will benefit you both academically and professionally.

HOW DO YOU DEMONSTRATE CRITICAL THINKING?

One typically cannot deliver a sufficient overview of a topic without thoroughly understanding it. In an academic program, we are required to both learn new information and to evaluate our existing knowledge

and assumptions. We must go beyond our current understanding and more deeply consider the topics or concepts we are studying. Thus, when a professor says “demonstrate critical thinking in your writing,” they are asking you to offer more than a summary of the textbook or your opinions about the topic. Here are some steps to help you demonstrate critical thinking in your writing.

1) READ

Your goal is to achieve specific learning objectives by engaging with the lectures and assigned reading. Your task is to engage with assigned reading or lectures and to gain foundational knowledge about the topic. When you are asked to write about a topic, review the prompt or assignment directions before you begin your reading and research. This will allow you to more conscientiously focus on the key points that you must address in your writing.

2) RESEARCH

Your textbook provides necessary information that allows you to attain foundational knowledge. However, critical thinking requires that we consider the information more deeply. We should go beyond the textbook to take into account what other experts and professionals have to say about the subject. Thus, we should look to scholarly sources of information. As you complete research, look for information that fits the context and purpose of what you must write about.

Subject experts write scholarly sources. The information that they present has been reviewed and evaluated by other professionals who have considerable knowledge and experience on the subject. One way

to access scholarly information is by using the online databases offered through MVNU's library [<http://library.mvnu.edu>] .

3) EVALUATE

The next step is to thoroughly and logically apply the information. To do this requires that we reflect, observe, weigh evidence, analyze, and evaluate the information. It may seem like this is a tedious or time-consuming task. But with practice, evaluating information becomes infused in your thinking process. Here is a link to the [Intellectual Standards](http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/universal-intellectual-standards/527) [<http://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/universal-intellectual-standards/527>] . Be sure to look these over. You will find guiding questions to help you reshape the way that you think. If you would like more information, you may want to read [The Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking](http://www.criticalthinking.org/files/Concepts_Tools.pdf). [http://www.criticalthinking.org/files/Concepts_Tools.pdf]

4) WRITE

As you can see, there is a lot of pre-work that needs to happen before we actually begin to write critically. Before typing up your response to a discussion question or writing a paper, consider what you have learned. If you have gained sufficient knowledge through your research and evaluation, then your thoughts will flow more easily and you will be able to articulate a critical response.

- ***Write with a purpose.*** Consider the writing prompt and identify your argument (thesis). What information do you need to convey? What key points will you make? How will you structure your thoughts? Your professor will be looking to see if you both understand the concept and know how to apply it.

Thoroughly explain the concept, theory, or model. Use your own words to explain the knowledge that you have gained through your research. Avoid dropping in dictionary definitions or quotes to convey meaning or explain the topic. Do not simply summarize what the textbook said about the topic. *Share what you have learned.*

Share what it means in real life. Use examples to illustrate your key points. What are your observations? What has your experience shown? How does it apply in the real world or in your own life? Are there any moral or spiritual implications?

- ***Support your assertions and opinions.*** Through your research, you have gained valuable knowledge on the topic. Thus, you should be able to articulate an informed response. When you make a claim, offer the reader evidence from the scholarly sources that informed your research and knowledge on the topic. Take caution to ensure the outside content does not overshadow your original thoughts on the topic. Aim for less than 20% content from others on any submission. Avoid using too many quotes or stringing together quotes. Don't use ideas from other sources to replace your own thoughts. Instead, carefully use the information to back up your assertions.

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Reference

Dr. Richard Paul and Dr. Linda Elder, The Miniature Guide to Critical

Thinking: Concepts and Tools (Foundation for Critical Thinking, 6th ed., 2009. Kindle Edition), Location 41.

