



# REPORT ON CRITICAL THINKING

Date: May 9, 2016  
To: Future ENGL 317 Students  
From: Richard DeAvila  
Subject: Critical Thinking: Then and Now

On Tuesday February 23<sup>rd</sup>, Professor Willison's ENGL 317 class had a discussion regarding whether people utilize critical thinking skills today more than they did a hundred years ago. After a lengthy discussion and an unexpected exercise, the class remained split on the issue. This reports objective is to inform the future students of ENGL 317 of the importance of critical thinking, and the various methods to hone this valuable skill.

## A STRANGE ASSIGNMENT

Professor Willison had the class get out a clean sheet of paper and a pen or hi-liter. Confused faces looked towards one another as the class was instructed to color their thumbs, and to press it onto the sheet of paper. Doing this seemed pointless, but it had a much more profound meaning than what was apparent at the moment... a meaning that would light up a bigger point Professor Willison was going to make.

### Independent Thought

Are people nowadays too acquiescent? Professor Willison briefly lectured on the effects mass media and a submissive society have on independent thinking. People are told their entire lives what and how to think. Being in the midst of a heated election year, the class knew too well what Prof. Willison was talking about. Social media, television and so many more outlets of communication are endlessly influencing our decision making. To provide solid evidence of our passiveness, the professor pointed to our colored thumbs. He had us stumped.



## CRITICAL THINKING

The class embarked on a thought project over how our critical thinking skills are utilized – do we think more or less than people a hundred years ago? The class was approximately evenly divided on the question. Those that argued that present folk think more raised the many complexities of the modern age that people back then did not have. People nowadays are always on the move – life is hectic, and there is always something that has to be done. Those opposed to this idea brought up how simplified technology is made so that people can work them. Sure, the world is more complex but many of these complexities are ‘dumbed down’ so that just anybody can do/use them. Professor Willison brought up a microwave as an example: we know how to press a few buttons on it so it heats something up, but few actually understand how a microwave even works. The habit that many people nowadays have of relying on technology also degrade our ability to think critically.

### Importance of Critical Thinking

The importance of critical thinking should be obvious to any university student. Utilizing this skill can make the difference between an A and a B, or a passing grade and a failing one. It is what separates students

between those who analyze and come to thought out conclusions, and those who just repeat what they remembered in lecture. The ability to think critically allows you to grow as an individual, as it provides a foundation of logical decision making from which you can draw from to make decisions. You are making decisions on **your** logic and pool of knowledge, not someone else’s.

Critical thinking also helps you stay calm in stressful situations, as you can rely on your decision making skills. This will come in handy when you are stressing out during finals week, redoing those assignments for 317 that you should have done weeks before. Critical thinking leads to



Critical Thinking and Listening are the most valuable attributes a recruiter sees in a potential employee. Source: Pennsylvania State University

intellectual improvement; you will perform better academically and professionally. It is not always so simple, however.

## Hindrances to Critical Thinking

If critical thinking is so important, then why is it the case that many just do not have or utilize this skill? There are many habits and devices that prevent people from developing their critical thinking.

### Passiveness

People that are passive usually lack critical thinking skills because they are accustomed to doing what they are told, or not thinking for themselves. Like Professor Willison demonstrated when we colored our thumbs, the class did something (and quite silly) for no reason than because they were told, which was not a good sign of critical thinking. Blindly obeying orders is detrimental to critical thinking as you are *not thinking*, you are just doing. Think critically and be confident in your intellectual abilities (within reason of course).

### TECHNOLOGY

Technology is a double edged sword when it comes to critical thinking. It is obviously more complex, which will require more complex operation, and hence more thinking. On the other hand, it aims to simplify doing things, which ‘dumbs’ us down. People back then would have to come up with ingenious solutions to their problems, whereas now people have technology that can do so much for them. It has come to dominate so much of the world around us that many people would not be able to get by without it.

### DISTRACTIONS

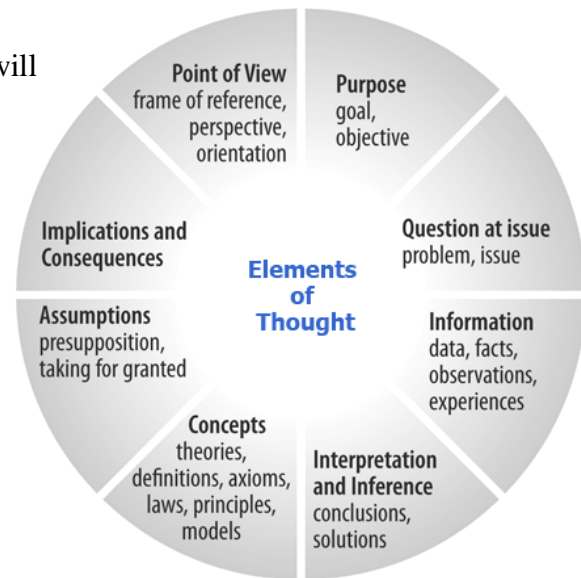
This is perhaps the biggest block to critical thinking. When people are too busy doing other things that contribute nothing to their intellectual growth, they fall behind. Critical thinking is a skill, and like all skills needs to be sharpened. When distractions are coupled with technology, critical thinking takes the blunt of the damage. So many technologies, especially smartphones, waste hours upon hours of people’s lives with nonsense.

## Ways to Improve

The more you think critically, the better refined it will become. There are various way in which you can reproduce brain cells, improving your cognitive abilities. Some of these methods include:

- Aerobic exercises, like running
- Thinking intense activities, such as puzzles
- Slightly changing certain ways you do something (that will require you to think)

Wrinkles in the brain are developed when critical thinking is utilized, which are a sign of increased “brainpower”, as we called it in class. As you can see critical thinking does not have to be limited to “boring” school stuff.



## Conclusion

Learn to think critically not just to be smarter, but to be more of an individual. Do not fall into the trap of passiveness, laziness, or distractions. There are many ways to improve your critical thinking, so get right to it! It will be among your most useful tools in life!