Critical Thinking

Intellectual Character and Standards

Video Lecture

The best thinkers don’t believe everything they hear or read. Instead, they use intellectual standards to decide what to believe and keep their thinking on track. This video lecture focuses on how your thinking improves when you use intellectual standards every day.

Developing Intellectual Character and Standards

Video script:

Narrator: We have looked at the three kinds of thinkers and determined that the fair-minded critical thinker is one who thinks of others. Fair-minded critical thinkers also want to develop intellectual habits or traits. These traits define how they live their lives, how they learn, how they communicate with others and how they see the world. We will examine a few of the important intellectual traits. Fair-minded critical thinkers use the following traits to define their thinking and their lives: intellectual integrity, intellectual independence, intellectual perseverance, intellectual empathy, intellectual humility, intellectual courage, confidence in reason, and fair-mindedness. What do these traits really mean?

Intellectual integrity means that you act towards others the way you want people to act towards you. Respect others in the same way you want to be respected. Intellectual independence means that you figure things out for yourself. It is good to listen to what others are thinking, but you must do your own thinking. Intellectual perseverance means that you will keep working hard no matter what. Don’t quit. If your subjects are hard, keep trying. Don’t be afraid to work hard. Intellectual empathy means that you make an effort to understand how other people think and feel. When you see things from other people’s viewpoint, you will often discover that there are some things that both of you are right about. Intellectual humility means that you recognize that you don’t know everything. Refrain from saying something is true without knowing for sure that it is. Always ask how do I know that? How do you know that? Intellectual courage means that you are able to speak up for what you think is right, even if it is not popular with you or your friends.
Sometimes speaking up can be dangerous. Use your best judgment to determine when to speak up and when to keep your thoughts to yourself. Remember to be respectful of others when you do speak up. Confidence in reason means that you use accurate and relevant information as you come to conclusions. Think about problems from different points of view. Finally, fair-mindedness means that you look for the fairest conclusion in every situation. It means that you think about everyone involved, not just about yourself.

The best thinkers don’t believe everything they hear or read, so how does a fair-minded critical thinker decide what to believe? Well, they use intellectual standards to keep their thinking on track. Critical thinkers are clear, accurate, relevant, logical, fair, and reasonable. Let's examine these standards a little closer. When we are clear, it means we understand what we are saying, hearing, reading, or writing. When something is accurate, it is true and not distorted. When something is relevant, it relates directly to the problem you are trying to solve, the question you are trying to answer or whatever you are talking or writing about. When thinking is logical, everything fits together and everything makes sense. We are being fair when we consider the feelings of others before we do something. It is important to be fair to both ourselves and to others. It is important to test your intellectual standards.

Here are some questions you can ask to target these standards. For clarity, ask, “Could you elaborate further? Could you give me an example? Could you draw a picture of what you mean?”

For accuracy, you may ask, “How could you check on that? How could you find out if that is true? Are you sure you aren't distorting the truth?”

For precision, you may ask, “Could you be more specific? Could you give me more details? Could you be more exact?”

For relevance, you could ask, “How does what you say relate to the problem? How does that bear on the question? How does that help me with the issue?”

For depth, try asking, “What makes this a difficult problem? What are some of the complexities of this question? What are some of the difficulties I need to deal with?”

For breadth, ask, “Do we need to look at this from another perspective? Do we need to consider another point of view? Do we need to look at this in other ways?”
For logic, you may ask, “Does all this make sense together? Are we looking at this reasonably? Does what you say follow from the evidence?”

For significance, ask, “Is this the most important problem to consider? Is this the central idea to focus on? Which of these facts are most important?”

For fairness, you may ask, “Am I considering all the relevant viewpoints? Am I being selfish or am I being fair to myself and to others?”

If everyone in the world regularly used intellectual standards, we could solve most of our big problems. Intellectual standards help you think better. They help you keep your thinking on track. By targeting clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, and fairness, one can be certain that he is considered a good thinker, a fair-minded thinker.

End of video.

**Traits of a Fair-Minded Critical Thinker**

You've heard words such as courage, empathy, humility, and integrity describe a person possessing moral integrity. Being a fair-minded critical thinker requires integrating these same traits with our thinking processes. However, what does it mean to be a person with intellectual empathy or intellectual courage? This activity covers the traits of a fair-minded critical thinker and their definitions.

**Interactive Activity: Traits of a Fair-Minded Critical Thinker**

Identifies the traits of fair-minded critical thinkers. Traits include:

1. confidence in reason,
2. fair-mindedness,
3. intellectual courage,
4. intellectual empathy,
5. intellectual humility,
6. intellectual independence,
7. intellectual integrity, and
8. intellectual perseverance.
Targeting Intellectual Standards: A Checklist of Questions

Reasoning is the process of forming conclusions, judgments, or inferences from facts or premises. To reason well, we must scrutinize the process we are using. What are we trying to figure out? What information do we need? Do we have that information? How can we check it for accuracy? The less conscious we are of how we are thinking, the easier it is to make mistakes.

Critical thinkers check the quality of their reasoning by applying intellectual standards such as accuracy, depth, and clarity to their thought processes when trying to solve problems or resolve issues. This activity covers questions critical thinkers use to improve their reasoning capabilities.

Interactive Activity: Targeting Intellectual Standards: A Checklist of Questions

Lists questions critical thinkers can use to improve their reasoning capabilities.

- To check accuracy, ask: "How can we check that?" and "Are we sure we aren't distorting the truth?"
- To check breadth, ask: "Do we need to consider other viewpoints or perspectives?"
- To check clarity, ask: "Can you elaborate further or give me an example?"
- To check depth, ask: "What makes this a difficult problem?" and "What are some of the complexities of this question?"
- To check fairness, ask: "Am I considering all the relevant viewpoints and being fair to others?"
- To check logic, ask: "Does all this make sense and are we looking at this reasonably?"
- To check precision, ask: "Can you be more specific or give me more details?"
- To check relevance, ask: "How does this help us with the issue?"
- To check significance, ask: "What is the most important problem to consider?"

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