

What Is Critical Thinking?

I'm sure you've heard of critical thinking, but do you have a good understanding of what it is and how you can benefit from developing this intellectual skill? By definition, critical thinking is *“the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action.”* (Michael Scriven & Richard Paul).

In other words, critical thinking is a rather complex process of gathering information, sorting it, analyzing it, and then drawing logical conclusions based on what you've learned during your research. We use critical thinking in our daily lives when we choose the best health care plan to sign up for, decluttering our closet, or deciding what work project to focus on next. We rely on this important skill anytime there's an important decision to be made that involves a lot of different factors or large amounts of information.

We're not born with the skill of critical thinking. It's a skill that has to be learned. In fact, these concepts are introduced only in the later years of higher education. Think back to your childhood and early school days. Everything was black and white, and you were usually able to find the “right” answer to any question or problem. The real world is more complicated than that. Frequently we face obstacles with more than one equally correct answer or solution. Because of that, it's essential we develop critical thinking skills that enable us to make right and valued choices.

Critical thinking is also a much sought-after skill in the job market. The higher you climb the corporate ladder, the more you'll be required to sharpen and use your critical thinking skills to make important decisions. As a project manager or small business owner, your choices will not only affect your job and your bottom line, but also the lives of the people you work for and with. As your business grows, or

you make it to a top corporate position, your choices will start to affect even more people. It should come as no surprise then that critical thinking skills are a big factor when it comes to hiring and promotions.

The best way to sharpen your critical thinking skills is to practice. Get yourself in the habit of paying attention to your thought processes. Analyze them, review the data, and make yourself think through a problem and possible solutions logically. The more you practice this skill, the easier it will become and the better you'll get at it. Most importantly, it's something that will serve you well for years and years to come.