

Beulah Heights University

Clear and Critical Thinking

A Project

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Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Divinity

By

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Clear and critical thinking is a valuable tool to have. Marck E. Estemil noted "Your greatest weapon is your MIND! Lock and load it with the greatest ammunition; EDUCATION. And protect it with your best defense; GOD." Clear and critical thinking does not mean an absence of external ideas or thoughts. When those words are stated most people don't see the essence of how important it is to remove the psychological clutter from their psychological processes. Clear and critical thinking pertains to being able to take supplemental information (relevant), analyze it and come to a clear, succinct solution or conclusion.

Often times the problem that is evident when looking at clear and critical thinking is when people enter into a particular topic with presuppositions formed that the learner is unwilling to leave room to adjust and understand others. Vyhmeister and Robertson contend "a presupposition is a basic understanding that undergirds one's thinking on a given topic¹." Writing doesn't happen in a vacuum, it is comprised of research from others within the same field that have been deemed credible. I had an older gentleman tell me some years ago "if you're willing to learn from others, you'll reduce the time and effort of making the same possible mistake and learning from your own actions." Vyhmeister and Robertson revealed "Presuppositions are

¹ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Your Guide to Writing quality Research Papers For Students of religion and Theology.* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 101

neither bad nor good²." It is when those presuppositions prevent the learner from being able to clearly see another's point of view on a particular subject.

Clear and critical thinking assists the writer from being presented as an unstable and unstructured writer. Resnick (1987) detailed 8 different elements that learner's should consider when considering if they are operating from the aspect of clear and critical thinking:

1. Is my idea/argument a good or a bad idea?
2. Is my idea/argument valid and defensible? Or is it invalid and indefensible?
3. Is my position on the issue rational and reasonable?
4. Do I deal with the complexity of the situation or do I use cliché and stereotypes to get points across?
5. Do I delve deep into the topic or only touch upon surface issues?
6. Do I address other points of view properly?
7. Do I question my own ideas and test them for validity?
8. Do I have specific goals in mind with this writing?

Clear and critical thinking assists the writer in assessing all areas needed when writing a paper of substance and validity, based off the research of the learner. Clear and critical thinking allows the writer to check for validity, precision, accuracy and context throughout the entire writing process.

Without clear and critical thinking, undefined terms, ambiguity, vagueness, and generality will be evident in the

² Ibid, 102

writer's presented work. Vagueness is an issue that plagues writers across the board, regardless of the level of the academic writing. Bertrand Russell noted "Everything is vague to a degree you do not realize until you have tried to make it precise." As with presuppositions, vagueness is not necessarily a bad thing. It is when it becomes excessive that useful information is no longer attainable. Ambiguity is dangerous. Collen Johnson of the California State Prison, Tehachapi, noted in a case of an inmate:

"The burglar and 16 year old accomplice activated a silent alarm while illegally entering a building. The 16 year old accomplice was in possession of a firearm. Upon the local police arriving to the scene, the police officer attempted to talk him into surrendering the firearm, the older burglar instructed the 16 year old accomplice to let the police have it; he fired the weapon and shot the police officer."

The ambiguity in this case was extremely dangerous and one of the extreme cases. There are other times when ambiguity can be humorous and harmless. For example, an anonymous author stated "I asked my mother if I were a gifted child. She said they certainly would not have paid for me." When using ambiguity it is important to be clear in the meaning of the ambiguity used, unless of course it is intentional to confuse readers.

Generality is also counter-productive to clear and critical thinking when writing an academic paper. When

generality is present in a learner's academic writing it reveals evidence of the learner being distracted and psychologically distant from writing with validity and cohesiveness. George Saunders of The Guardian (2006) contended "the traveler must, of course always be cautious of the overly broad generalization. But I am an American, and a paucity of data does not stop me from making sweeping, vague, conceptual statements, and if necessary, following these statements up with troops." As it is seen, this is one of the most interesting statements made. In essence, if you don't understand what I am saying, then I can just use troops to help you understand. Making general statements and not specifying the meaning of those things said is just as dangerous and counter-productive as ambiguity and vagueness.

In conclusion, clear and critical thinking requires learners to:

1. Be engaged in active acquisition of information
2. Thoroughly look at the evidence
3. Avoid jumping to conclusions
4. Avoid redundancy and self-evidences
5. Avoid oversimplification

Clear and critical thinking is a necessary tool and action for learners. In order for the research to be carried out in a succinct and accurate manner, then applied to an academic writing, the mind of learner's have to be free of unnecessary

clutter and distractions. Clear and critical thinking assists learners in research thinking, choosing a topic, planning research, finding and evaluating resources in the Library and using and evaluating resources on the internet. Without it learners are doomed to submit an academic paper that will not be substantial and/or accurate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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