

‘CLEAR AND CRITICAL THINKING’

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CONTENTS

Outline

- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Clear Purpose**
- 3. Formulating a viable argument**
- 4. Planning and Organization**
- 5. Laying aside old ideas that defy new information**
- 6. Emotions vs. Reason**
- 7. Inherited Opinion**
- 8. Fact and Truth**
- 9. Re thinking your belief**
- 10. Conclusion**

INTRODUCTION

‘CLEAR AND CRITICAL THINKING’

How does one begin to write a sound and well thought out research paper that makes sense to their readers? It must first begin with ‘clear and critical thinking.’ Dictionary.com defines it as disciplined thinking that is clear, rational, open-minded, and informed by evidence. Wikipedia further states that it is “the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment.”¹ So when we look at critical thinking it must involve a problem that needs to be solved, an issue or premise to be evaluated, or an argument or claim that needs to be considered, for rendering a reasonable judgment in order to form an intelligent, valid and truthful conclusion.

“Critical thinking can lead to clearer thinking and clearer writing. During writing, especially when writing for a given audience, it is necessary to engage in critical thinking when planning out an argument and providing the premises and conclusions.”²

Secondly we must be clear on our purpose. What are we trying to prove? Is there a reasonable question or problem that needs to be solved, which would be based on information that we have read, or heard? Craig Skelton suggests that we must ‘set a clear purpose’ which would move us into the direction in order to formulate a proper and viable argument. Thinking

1. Critical thinking - Wikipedia, accessed Sept 29, 2017, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_thinking

2. “The Relationship Between Clear and Critical Thinking and Writing,” Universal Class, accessed September 30, 2017, <https://www.universalclass.com/.../critical-thinking.../the-relationship-between-clear-a..>

critically often causes us to ask questions. Philosopher and author of ‘Quick Thinking on your Feet,’ shares with her online audience three key messages for clear and critical thinking:

1. “How to ask the right question to get the best answers.
2. How to make negative thinking into positive action
3. How to gain strong leadership by communicating in a way that makes sense to other people.”³

We must give much thoughtful consideration when we begin the process of clear and critical thinking, and this process is not synonymous with criticizing. Before we can jump to any valid conclusions, we actually need to see if there is a valid question or problem that actually needs to be solved. Is there an argument that has substance? Once you have decided that the issue is one that is relative and one that can be researched and a judgment can be made, you begin the organizational process of gathering information and recording in detail your findings. You will have to lay aside your preconceived notions previously held ideas that will hinder you from considering what may be found that is oppositional to your beliefs. This thinking may refer to something you have been presented with or you have seen it or read about it prior to your investigation. But your answers will not be quick and coming to judgments will take time, as Nancy Vyhmeister suggests, if you are to come up with a true and reasonable conclusion. “We select a view or an action that seems most apt in light of our deliberation. Most of the view we choose are subject to change as new information presents itself.”⁴ In critical thinking you should be purposeful and deliberate keeping in mind that truth should reign. Again in the process you should take your time, because it requires that you be thorough, and your focus

3. “Valerie Pierce - Author of Quick Thinking on Your Feet,” You tube, accessed September 30, 2017, <https://youtu.be/ZI1rI8rhYOg>.

4. Howard W. Stone and James O. Duke, *How to Think Theologically*, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 119.

should be on the issue in order to totally evaluate all of the parts of the claim. This will mean that you will not just be coming to a yes or no decision about an argument. As you assess each part of the problem, in most cases when you investigate and deliberate carefully you will find more areas that appear grey, than the simplicity of black and white, open and shut conclusion.

Critical thinking requires careful intentional thinking, use of reason or logic, judgment about beliefs and applications to real world problems and issues.

Dr. Peter Boghossian suggests to his online audience that ‘if you are not evaluating ideas or way of thinking or epistemic systems then you are not critically thinking, and a common confusion that arises is when people think making a judgment about an idea is the same as making a judgment about a person. People require dignity, ideas do not.’

One of the questions in this forum of conversation is that during the process of critical thinking, would you be able to reconsider or change your beliefs in accordance with your new findings. It is important to note here that many times what people do even after in depth research, is to go with the popularity of a claim, which may be due to what they have heard or been told all their lives. They may not be inclined to go with the evidence of the truth of the claim as they are not willing to reconsider their belief systems even after the evidence has caused them to arrive at the conclusion. Dr. Boghossian states in his lecture that there are two ‘core components’ in critical thinking, skill sets and attitude.

Critical thinking shows us that it is a more complex exercise in problem solving. You may have to defend your own claims which sometimes can become a struggle within yourself, especially if it comes against that belief you have had a long connection. It is at this time you will have to put other ways of forming your conclusions, such as your emotions, your intuition and your faith, under the microscope of reason.

In critical thinking, the issue of faith stands out to me because that stands up to what I believe to be true, and that belief is my faith in the Word of God. The Word to me is absolutely true and at the end of the day it will be my assessment of that truth that I will be able to take a stance. With the claim of this truth, I would have to take a position and would not be flawed in making a reasonable judgment as it relates to defending what is my inherited opinion, based on insight, understanding, research and investigation.

I was in a recent conversation concerning that which was fact verses what was true and it went like this. The fact that was obvious because of the physical tests that were performed, was that the person had the dreaded diagnosis of cancer, but the truth that was claimed, according to the Word of God is that ‘by His stripes they are healed,’ even though there was no physical evidence that could be seen by the naked eye of that truth. It was a belief upon which they drew the conclusion.

I have come to another understanding in arriving at a conclusion as it relates to finding the truth of an argument, in that the facts may differ from what is known to be truth. So the question also comes to mind, who determines truth. A person may take an analytical stance on an issue, a problem or argument with regard to assessing claims with which they have read, heard, or been connected to all of their life. It is their belief system. One example given which could be a substantial argument is the statement, that in the freezing dead of winter, ‘if you go outside without a jacket, you will catch a cold.’ Well that is up for consideration, is it truth or is it a fact based on what ‘usually’ may or may not happen?

“The ultimate objective in thinking critically is to come to conclusions that are correct and to make decisions that are wise. Because decisions reflect our conclusions, the purpose of thinking critically is to come to correct conclusion...Concluding involves believing. When it

comes to thinking critically about an issue is to determine what, exactly the issue is. Critical Thinking is the careful application of reason in the determination of whether a claim is true.”⁵

Is the claim true, which is what causes us to act, and then based on that information we are asked to take a position regarding what is truth, and our conclusion should be equally true. We will then be able to make a reasonable judgment as to why or why not you have taken a position and concluded in that manner. Again coming to a conclusion takes time, but one must appreciate the value of stepping back and evaluating the process which will yield good results and a conclusion that makes sense to all parties. Make sure you develop concrete reasoning and do not leave out information that could hinder or falsify you being able to defend your conclusion. If the premise is true, then the conclusion is true.

Kerry Walters argues that rationality demands more than just logical or traditional methods of problem solving and analysis or ‘calculus of justification’ but also considers cognitive acts such as imagination, conceptual creativity, intuition and insight.”⁶

It is ultimately important that we use critical thinking in developing arguments that are valid and need to be evaluated. The conclusions which are found will ultimately affect the things we consider and also affect our actions. It may also cause change in belief systems. “We think critically when we evaluate the reasoning we and others use in coming to conclusions.”⁷

5. Brooke Noel Moore and Richard Parker, *Critical Thinking*, 11th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw Hill Education, 2015), 3, 6.

6. Kerry Walters, *Re-Thinking Reason: New Perspectives in Critical Thinking*, ed. Kerry S. Walters (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 63

7. Brooke Noel Moore and Richard Parker, *Critical Thinking*, pg. 20