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00:00:00,000 --> 00:00:00,453

The Definition and Purpose of Critical Thinking

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00:00:00,453 --> 00:00:04,543

What comes to mind when someone says you need to use

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00:00:04,543 --> 00:00:07,574

“critical thinking”? Do you focus on the word

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00:00:07,574 --> 00:00:11,833

“critical”? Do you assume that thinking critically
must be negative

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00:00:11,833 --> 00:00:14,944

requiring you to criticize or be
critical if something you've

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00:00:14,944 --> 00:00:19,834

read, heard, or watched? The modules you
will complete in this course will help you

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00:00:19,834 --> 00:00:20,634

understand

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00:00:20,634 --> 00:00:23,754

what critical thinking is and
how you can do it.

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00:00:23,754 --> 00:00:28,524

As we go through this module, you will
learn that thinking critically

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00:00:28,524 --> 00:00:32,014

should not be assumed to be synonymous
with CRITICIZING

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00:00:32,014 --> 00:00:36,674
once you learn to think critically,
you MIGHT criticize an argument or claim,

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00:00:36,674 --> 00:00:40,343
but your thinking will be thoughtfully
reasoned consideration

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00:00:40,343 --> 00:00:43,744
NOT reflexive, quick, and unthinking
judgment.

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00:00:43,744 --> 00:00:46,913
In the concept of critical thinking,

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00:00:46,913 --> 00:00:51,784
the term “critical” refers to a way of
thinking, an analytical stance you take

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00:00:51,784 --> 00:00:54,424
with regards to assessing claims
that you have read,

17
00:00:54,424 --> 00:00:57,464
heard, or saw. In this module

18
00:00:57,464 --> 00:01:01,014
we will explain the concept and activity
of critical thinking

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00:01:01,014 --> 00:01:05,964
1) we will construct a useful, everyday
definition of critical thinking

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00:01:05,964 --> 00:01:09,894
and identify what critical thinking is NOT; and
2) show

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00:01:09,894 --> 00:01:13,104
you the PURPOSE and VALUE of
critical thinking.

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00:01:13,104 --> 00:01:16,684
According to one definition, critical
thinking

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00:01:16,684 --> 00:01:20,484
is "the careful application of reason
in the determination

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00:01:20,484 --> 00:01:24,333
of whether a claim is true." Another
definition

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00:01:24,333 --> 00:01:27,403
holds that critical thinking is
"judicious reasoning

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00:01:27,403 --> 00:01:33,113
about what to believe and, therefore, what
to do." Let's note the important pieces of

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00:01:33,113 --> 00:01:34,263
these definitions;

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00:01:34,263 --> 00:01:37,613
critical thinking requires: 1)

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00:01:37,613 --> 00:01:40,874
careful, intentional thinking also known
as

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00:01:40,874 --> 00:01:45,174
judiciousness; 2) the use of reason or
logic;

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00:01:45,174 --> 00:01:48,354

3) judgment about beliefs;

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00:01:48,354 --> 00:01:53,274

and finally 4) application to real world problems and issues.

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00:01:53,274 --> 00:01:58,333

Let's walk through these one by one.

Careful and Intentional

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00:01:58,333 --> 00:02:01,374

First, consider the ideas are being

"careful"

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00:02:01,374 --> 00:02:06,444

and "judicious." Critical thinking is not a fast or easy process even if you know

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00:02:06,444 --> 00:02:07,194

how to do it.

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00:02:07,194 --> 00:02:10,503

To do it properly requires you to take your time.

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00:02:10,503 --> 00:02:15,484

Being careful and judicious requires you to be purposeful and deliberate in your

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00:02:15,484 --> 00:02:16,554

evaluation.

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00:02:16,554 --> 00:02:20,614

It also requires you to be thorough. To think critically

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00:02:20,614 --> 00:02:24,674

you have to focus on the issue at hand,
taking in all its complexity,

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00:02:24,674 --> 00:02:27,864

breadth, and depth. Critical thinking

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00:02:27,864 --> 00:02:31,794

is NOT PASSIVE. The goal of critical
thinking

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00:02:31,794 --> 00:02:35,353

is not simply to decide whether to
accept or reject an argument

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00:02:35,353 --> 00:02:39,493

to register or “yea” or “nay” vote. In
critical thinking

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00:02:39,493 --> 00:02:44,214

the goal is to fully evaluate all parts
have a claim that someone has made

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00:02:44,214 --> 00:02:47,704

to assess each of its parts as well as
the whole.

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00:02:47,704 --> 00:02:51,743

Certainly there are relatively easy
black-and-white cases.

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00:02:51,743 --> 00:02:55,714

For example consider the claim that was
made in the day of Columbus,

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00:02:55,714 --> 00:02:59,034

when people said, "Ships sailing east from Europe

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00:02:59,034 --> 00:03:02,303

will eventually fall into space because the earth is flat."

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00:03:02,303 --> 00:03:05,404

You don't need to be an expert in critical thinking

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00:03:05,404 --> 00:03:09,693

to see this as an example of an argument that's pretty easy to reject in total

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00:03:09,693 --> 00:03:13,864

(assuming you know the earth is not flat). However,

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00:03:13,864 --> 00:03:18,284

much more often we are asked to think critically about more complex,

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00:03:18,284 --> 00:03:21,844

challenging claims or arguments that contain much more gray

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00:03:21,844 --> 00:03:26,303

than they do black or white. So in such cases it's much harder to say

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00:03:26,303 --> 00:03:33,064

"I agree" or "I disagree." Critical thinking is the logical process that you go

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00:03:33,064 --> 00:03:33,754

through

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00:03:33,754 --> 00:03:38,883

to determine whether you agree or not.
Critical thinking allows you to explain

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00:03:38,883 --> 00:03:40,344

WHY you disagree,

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00:03:40,344 --> 00:03:44,004

what parts as the claim argument you
find wrong or troubling,

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00:03:44,004 --> 00:03:47,454

and even what argument you might make in
its place.

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00:03:47,454 --> 00:03:51,564

As we proceed in learning about critical
thinking, you'll find that by

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00:03:51,564 --> 00:03:56,174

offering alternatives to the argument,
you and others involved strengthen and

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00:03:56,174 --> 00:03:58,504

clarify views and positions.

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00:03:58,504 --> 00:04:01,523

Thus, critical thinking can be seen as an
exercise

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00:04:01,523 --> 00:04:05,844

in collective problem-solving. Throughout
these critical thinking modules,

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00:04:05,844 --> 00:04:10,083

you will be asked to take what you learn
and apply it in class.

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00:04:10,083 --> 00:04:13,513

That means, thinking critically about what you're reading,

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00:04:13,513 --> 00:04:17,113

as well as claims made by your professor and classmates.

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00:04:17,113 --> 00:04:21,762

Sometimes you will have to critically evaluate claims made by others.

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00:04:21,762 --> 00:04:25,564

Other times you'll be asked actively defend your own claims,

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00:04:25,564 --> 00:04:29,274

which will require you to think critically about your own perspectives

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00:04:29,274 --> 00:04:31,404

and positions.

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00:04:31,404 --> 00:04:35,414

Critical thinking is not a process that most people do in their daily activities.

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00:04:35,414 --> 00:04:39,423

But it's important to both your understanding of what other people say

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00:04:39,423 --> 00:04:42,444

and what you think and say to others.

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00:04:42,444 --> 00:04:45,884

At times you may struggle to use the

critical thinking process – and that's

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00:04:45,884 --> 00:04:47,524

okay.

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00:04:47,524 --> 00:04:51,004

Number two – Reason or Logic

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00:04:51,004 --> 00:04:54,724

So, critical thinking is an active process meant to move us –

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00:04:54,724 --> 00:04:58,084

whether it's a class or another community that you belong to –

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00:04:58,084 --> 00:05:01,504

towards greater understanding of difficult economic,

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00:05:01,504 --> 00:05:04,894

social, ethical, and legal problems.

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00:05:04,894 --> 00:05:09,233

In order to do this effectively, critical thinking requires applying

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00:05:09,233 --> 00:05:14,013

REASON. Over the next few modules, we will examine more deeply

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00:05:14,013 --> 00:05:19,004

“reason”: we will develop yardsticks for assessing whether an argument is a

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00:05:19,004 --> 00:05:21,894

product of good, thoughtful reasoning.

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00:05:21,894 --> 00:05:26,513

We will compare reason with other ways of judging or reacting to claims.

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00:05:26,513 --> 00:05:31,434

For example, people often make decisions based on pure emotion

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00:05:31,434 --> 00:05:36,624

intuition, faith, or common sense.

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00:05:36,624 --> 00:05:40,694

Utilizing reason does not necessarily mean throwing these sensibilities –

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00:05:40,694 --> 00:05:44,154

emotion, intuition, etcetera – out the window.

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00:05:44,154 --> 00:05:47,483

It's not cold, hard, or unfeeling.

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00:05:47,483 --> 00:05:51,744

But critical thinking requires putting these other ways of thinking and reacting

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00:05:51,744 --> 00:05:55,374

under the microscope of reason. For example,

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00:05:55,374 --> 00:05:59,603

many people decide not to try certain activities because, they say,

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00:05:59,603 --> 00:06:02,703

"I'm too scared I can't go running

tonight.”

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00:06:02,703 --> 00:06:07,233

“I don't have anyone else to run with and I'm afraid of running by myself at night.”

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00:06:07,233 --> 00:06:11,214

Fear, like all emotions can either be justified

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00:06:11,214 --> 00:06:15,334

or unfounded when we expose this emotional response to reason,

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00:06:15,334 --> 00:06:19,573

we can determine whether it's justified or not. Are there good reasons to be

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00:06:19,573 --> 00:06:21,504

fearful a running alone at night?

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00:06:21,504 --> 00:06:24,714

Is the area known for crime? Are there wild

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00:06:24,714 --> 00:06:29,194

animals are dogs to worry about? Is it easy to get lost?

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00:06:29,194 --> 00:06:33,724

By asking these kinds of questions we can probe to see whether our emotion –

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00:06:33,724 --> 00:06:38,774

fear – is the product of a reasonable assessment of the situation.

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00:06:38,774 --> 00:06:43,013
3) and 4) Judgments and Application

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00:06:43,013 --> 00:06:46,684
Finally, let's consider these last two
pieces of the definition of critical

111
00:06:46,684 --> 00:06:47,614
thinking –

112
00:06:47,614 --> 00:06:51,474
determining whether a claim is true and
deciding how to act

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00:06:51,474 --> 00:06:56,554
based on that determination. These speak to
the PURPOSE of critical thinking.

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00:06:56,554 --> 00:07:00,953
When we engage in critical thinking, our
goal is to determine whether the claim

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00:07:00,953 --> 00:07:02,784
before us is true or not,

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00:07:02,784 --> 00:07:05,894
and then to use that assessment to
decide what action

117
00:07:05,894 --> 00:07:09,154
or actions to take. Ultimately,

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00:07:09,154 --> 00:07:13,923
when we were asked to think critically
we are being asked to take a position

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00:07:13,923 --> 00:07:18,904

regarding the truth or acceptability of something we've read, heard, or watched.

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00:07:18,904 --> 00:07:22,974

While the exercise of critical thinking is not biased toward one outcome or the

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00:07:22,974 --> 00:07:23,914

other,

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00:07:23,914 --> 00:07:28,054

in the end, we are expected to have a REASONED judgment

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00:07:28,054 --> 00:07:33,374

about whether we disagree or agree with the claim or argument.

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00:07:33,374 --> 00:07:36,513

So why do we need to take a position or pass judgment?

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00:07:36,513 --> 00:07:40,964

Let's consider the following scenario: one of your classes require students to

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00:07:40,964 --> 00:07:42,483

complete a group project

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00:07:42,483 --> 00:07:46,254

worth fifty percent of the final grade. You are put into a group

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00:07:46,254 --> 00:07:51,853

with four other students. At your first meeting one of your group member says,

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00:07:51,853 --> 00:07:55,513

“Listen, I've done this whole group project thing before and it's a real

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00:07:55,513 --> 00:07:57,144

pain in the butt.

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00:07:57,144 --> 00:08:00,944

Nobody really likes working with other people, and we all just end up fighting

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00:08:00,944 --> 00:08:02,203

anyway.

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00:08:02,203 --> 00:08:05,314

It's too hard to split up the parts of the project – no one's

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00:08:05,314 --> 00:08:09,594

ever happy with their part. Last time I had to do one of these things

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00:08:09,594 --> 00:08:13,263

we decided that each of us would just do the whole project.

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00:08:13,263 --> 00:08:17,013

Then we shared our reports and voted on the best one.

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00:08:17,013 --> 00:08:20,453

That's the one we turn in the professor We should do the same thing for this

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00:08:20,453 --> 00:08:22,543

class.”

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00:08:22,543 --> 00:08:27,103

Is this a good argument? Do you agree with all of the claims he made?

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00:08:27,103 --> 00:08:30,104

Do those claims necessarily lead to his conclusion about

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00:08:30,104 --> 00:08:34,493

how to handle the project? Should you go along with your classmate,

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00:08:34,493 --> 00:08:38,333

or is there a better way to handle the project? Remember

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00:08:38,333 --> 00:08:42,052

50 percent of your final grade is at stake here!

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00:08:42,053 --> 00:08:46,214

Your classmates had certain experiences that make you believe that doing group

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00:08:46,214 --> 00:08:47,864

project work separately

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00:08:47,864 --> 00:08:52,524

as individuals is better than dividing up the tasks among the group.

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00:08:52,524 --> 00:08:56,654

If you simply accept his belief without question without thinking about it

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00:08:56,654 --> 00:08:57,803

critically,

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00:08:57,803 --> 00:09:03,183

you may come to share his belief simply as an "inherited opinion."

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00:09:03,183 --> 00:09:07,284

An inherited opinion means that you believe completing group projects this

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00:09:07,284 --> 00:09:08,044

way

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00:09:08,044 --> 00:09:11,584

is better because someone else told you it was better.

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00:09:11,584 --> 00:09:15,484

Now, many of us hold inherited opinions on a lot of topics. Frequently ore

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00:09:15,484 --> 00:09:16,313

political,

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00:09:16,313 --> 00:09:20,234

moral, and ethical beliefs have been handed down to us by our families our

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00:09:20,234 --> 00:09:21,724

communities.

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00:09:21,724 --> 00:09:26,504

How many of us could actually provide evidence or reasons for those beliefs,

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00:09:26,504 --> 00:09:31,813

if asked to do so? But we are often required to do just that.

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00:09:31,813 --> 00:09:35,844

We live in a diverse complicated world
in which people hold widely different

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00:09:35,844 --> 00:09:37,894

views on many topics.

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00:09:37,894 --> 00:09:42,134

Individuals, communities, businesses, and
governments need to decide

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00:09:42,134 --> 00:09:45,204

what to do you on many issues that are
the subject

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00:09:45,204 --> 00:09:48,873

a strong disagreements. Critical thinking

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00:09:48,873 --> 00:09:52,813

will help us both offer reasons for our
own positions on what action should be

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00:09:52,813 --> 00:09:53,904

taken

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00:09:53,904 --> 00:09:57,944

AND effectively evaluate the reasons
offered by others,

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00:09:57,944 --> 00:10:02,524

To see how important critical thinking
can be consider this scenario:

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00:10:02,524 --> 00:10:05,964

you're working as a marketing assistant
for a marketing company.

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00:10:05,964 --> 00:10:09,024

You've been in that position for a few years, and you're looking to catch the

170

00:10:09,024 --> 00:10:10,844

attention to your supervisor.

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00:10:10,844 --> 00:10:14,134

You know there's a marketing manager position opening up soon and you've got

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00:10:14,134 --> 00:10:15,313

your eye on it.

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00:10:15,313 --> 00:10:18,714

You want to distinguish yourself. Fortunately,

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00:10:18,714 --> 00:10:23,224

an opportunity presents itself. Your supervisor asked both you

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00:10:23,224 --> 00:10:27,344

and your co-worker (who's also an assistant) what you think the company

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00:10:27,344 --> 00:10:28,594

should focus on for an

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00:10:28,594 --> 00:10:33,014

upcoming ad campaign. Should they invest more resources in

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00:10:33,014 --> 00:10:37,493

traditional marketing venues – like print and TV ads for example,

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00:10:37,493 --> 00:10:42,433

or in innovative online and social media venues?

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00:10:42,433 --> 00:10:45,714

Wanting to seem like you're on top of things and ready to go,

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00:10:45,714 --> 00:10:49,813

you respond quickly with an email:
"Definitely traditional venues.

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00:10:49,813 --> 00:10:53,154

And here's how we should spend the money in those venues."

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00:10:53,154 --> 00:10:57,024

Your co-worker doesn't respond right away, but the next day offers her

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00:10:57,024 --> 00:10:58,524

assessment:

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00:10:58,524 --> 00:11:02,664

"We should go with online and social media. I've attached a detailed report

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00:11:02,664 --> 00:11:06,373

showing recent trends and market research, with data that demonstrates the

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00:11:06,373 --> 00:11:10,194

increase return on investment a social media marketing campaigns

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00:11:10,194 --> 00:11:13,474

compared with traditional venues."

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00:11:13,474 --> 00:11:17,454

Who do you think will get the attention of the supervisor? The employee who made

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00:11:17,454 --> 00:11:19,863

an unsupported claims about what to do

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00:11:19,863 --> 00:11:25,924

(you) or the employee who offered evidence in a reason for her position?

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00:11:25,924 --> 00:11:30,014

Taking the time to assess beliefs and opinions – to think critically about them –

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00:11:30,014 --> 00:11:34,104

gives us insight and understanding that we would not have developed

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00:11:34,104 --> 00:11:37,584

without critical thinking. Insight and understanding

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00:11:37,584 --> 00:11:40,784

leads to justification for taking or

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00:11:40,784 --> 00:11:44,433

not taking certain actions, but it also gives us

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00:11:44,433 --> 00:11:48,933

ownership over our beliefs. As we think critically about her own and

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00:11:48,933 --> 00:11:53,274

others beliefs, we develop the skills

that allow us to know why we believe

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00:11:53,274 --> 00:11:55,034

what we believe.

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00:11:55,034 --> 00:11:58,774

We can offer evidence in reason to defend our beliefs and that reason

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00:11:58,774 --> 00:12:02,464

giving leads us to actions that fit with our beliefs.

202

00:12:02,464 --> 00:12:05,954

Ultimately, we have true freedom of thought and opinion

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00:12:05,954 --> 00:12:10,123

that comes when we know what we believe and why.

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00:12:10,123 --> 00:12:14,284

This module has provided you with a working definition of critical thinking.

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00:12:14,284 --> 00:12:18,034

You should now be able to explain what critical thinking is

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00:12:18,034 --> 00:12:21,044

and how it's different from other types of thought.

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00:12:21,044 --> 00:12:24,414

You should understand the key features of critical thinking, and

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00:12:24,414 --> 00:00:00,000
to appreciate its purpose and value.