

HUMANISM & CRITICAL THINKING

It is important for us to understand that we, as human beings, are subject to mental attributes such as the common emotions that undermine and distort our attempts to be critical thinkers. Therefore, the most important skill that we can be aware of and practice is that of metacognition. This skill keeps us aware of our own thinking and especially of the fallacies of thought that creep into our everyday thinking. Some of the important fallacies are listed below:

Fallacies:

- Self interest
- Ethnocentrism
- Prejudice
- Bias
- Opinions
- Egocentrism
- Rumor or innuendo

Although critical thinking has been practiced in some of its attributes for many centuries, it is in modern times that it has been studied by scholars and made explicit in books and courses. There are many academic and practical books and materials for us to use to further our understanding, enhance our skills, and encourage our practice of this important subject. Booksellers, both online and brick and mortar offer many titles for adults, students and children. An excellent website for further information and materials on critical thinking is <http://www.criticalthinking.org>.



Humanism has roots in critical thinking stretching back to ancient times and the philosophy of humanism continues to be shaped and molded by it today. What is critical thinking and why is it so important to humanism?

Since humanism is a rational philosophy, it is dependent on a methodology that successfully addresses questions and problems related to the natural world. Critical thinking provides that methodology and includes skills, attitudes and dispositions that a person can learn and practice. In fact, science itself can be thought of as a subset of critical thinking. It is important to note that critical thinking is multidisciplinary; that is, it forms the basic elements for all domains of learning.



Contrary to popular opinion, critical thinking is not about the criticism of the ideas of others, but an internal, self-directed practice of thinking according to accepted skills, attitudes and dispositions. This is a much more difficult task and requires personal commitment, growth and especially, an awareness of the ego.

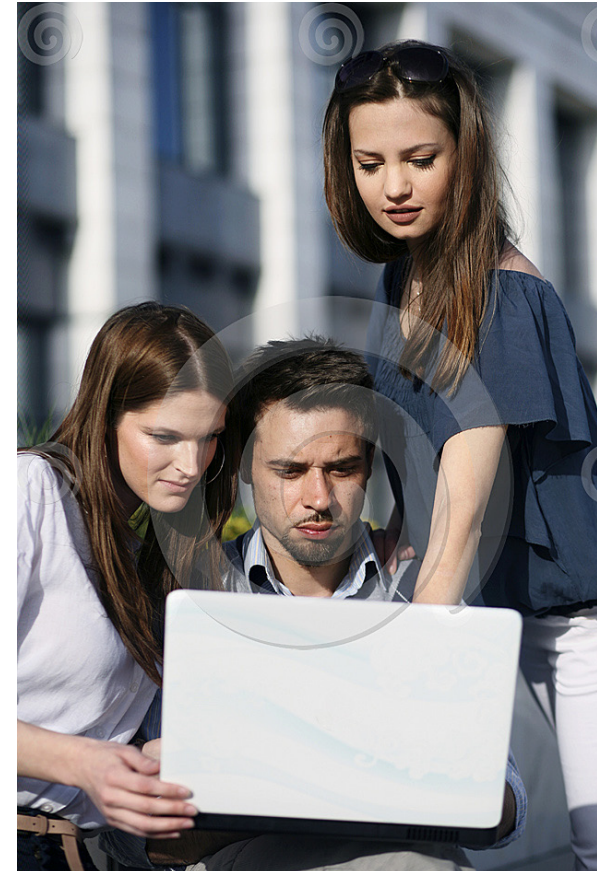
Just as there are standards for many purposeful activities in life, critical thinking sets the standards for successful thinking. Some of the more important standards or elements of critical thinking are listed below.

Skills:

- Metacognition or thinking about your own thinking
- Formulating a clear statement of the question
- Taking into account the total situation
- Identifying and questioning assumptions
- Active listening
- Empathy

Attitudes and Dispositions:

- Open to change
- Respectful of others
- Confident
- Open minded
- Curious
- Courageous
- Logical
- Objective
- Patient
- Fair



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