

## Chapter 4

# Thinking Critically About Critical Thinking



*“A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.”  
William Jones*

*“For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.” Romans 12:3*

## Degrees of Learning

### *In this chapter, you will:*

1. Understand what critical and biblical thinking is
2. Understand assumptions and inferences
3. Apply critical and biblical thinking skills
4. Evaluate and judge information
5. Learn three methods of critical thinking
6. Evaluate and ask questions

*“The function of education therefore is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate.”*

**Dr. Martin Luther King**

## “I Think. Therefore I Am”

You have been challenged to examine and reflect on your values, behaviors, and attitudes in the past three chapters. You’ve examined who you are and what you believe and you have practiced putting yourself in other people’s shoes to understand and empathize with them. You have studied and applied God’s Word and perspective of life and living. You have used the truth of scripture to adjust your attitude and develop compassion for others. These skills and processes will help you become more self-aware, which helps you in relationships, at home, in school, at work, and in life. We’ve spent a lot of time talking about **what** you think, but we haven’t looked at **how** you think. That’s where we’re headed here. We’re going to **think about thinking**. In essence, that’s what critical thinking is and to do it well requires years of practice. Critical thinking is not a skill that comes naturally to people, but it is a skill that will allow you to truly become an astute learner in life. Obviously we will not learn how to be good critical thinkers in just one chapter. However, throughout the 180 Degrees Program you will practice being more aware of how you think, which will ultimately help you to become better at analyzing situations and drawing logical conclusions.

## Tools for Life

- Critical Thinking Skills
- Questioning Skills
- Evaluative Skills







# A Critical Look at Critical Thinking

## “What would Jesus do?”

There’s something that needs to be said at the start of this chapter: learning to think critically is not easy, and it is not “natural” for humans. Let’s think about that for a minute. Think back on the writing prompts you’ve completed in this program thus far. How many times were your responses “stories”? How quickly were you able to decide what you think was right or wrong? How many times did you respond with confidence, only to change your view once you heard other people’s perspectives or read or watched something that presented a different point of view? Probably a lot, and that’s ok; that’s what humans instinctively do. We react to situations and issues based on our personal experiences, biases, beliefs and values. We do what education theorist David Perkins calls “Makes-sense epistemology,” which is a fancy phrase meaning that we tend to believe what seems to make sense to us. Our natural internal test for whether or not we think something is true is based on our instinct: if it sounds correct, makes sense, feels right, it must be true.

Critical thinking however, is much more complex than simply ‘reacting.’ It is a deliberate process of reasoning. Critical thinkers evaluate all sides of a situation, and develop a conclusion based on a reasoned argument. The difference between ‘regular thinking’ and ‘critical thinking’ is that, in critical thinking, the thinker is aware of how s/he is thinking, and is constantly striving to think in a disciplined, logical way. Why is this important? Consider your career as a student. How much of your time and energy for school-related, learning activities is spent thinking? Probably most of it. But when have you been taught about thinking and reasoning skills? When have you been taught how to think logically? Probably not at all. You are thinking all the time but in a haphazard way. Almost every encounter, action, task and belief requires you to think. Isn’t it interesting that with all this thinking going on, we never really learn about – or think about – how to be good at thinking?

*To think critically is to be aware of how you think—to understand what influences your thinking, and to learn how your brain processes information.*

dynamics, and reading two lines of music at the same time. And even if you learn all of those individual skills, to be a really good piano player, you have to be able to combine those skills in a fluid, cohesive manner.

Learning to be good at thinking critically is not unlike learning to be a really **good** piano player. To be a good critical thinker requires mastering a number of other lower-level skills and practicing them regularly. Practice here is the key. If you wanted

### Critical Thinking at a Glance

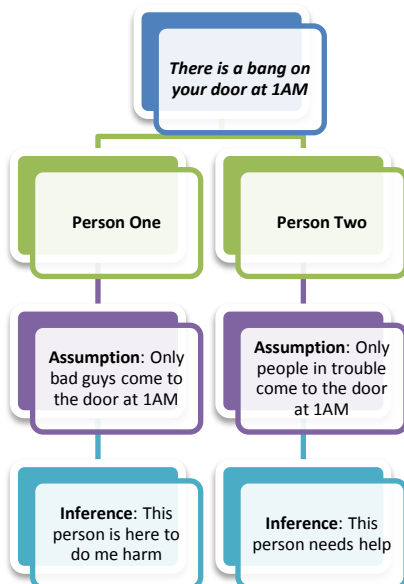
#### Critical Thinking is:

- Thinking for yourself rather than accepting as truth what others want you to believe
- Welcoming the chance to look at other points of view, ideas, or positions
- Using reasoning skills to work through questions and ideas
- Weighing ideas based on the merits, not who presents or supports them
- Creating questions to drive deeper thinking
- Using evaluation skills to judge arguments
- Using inquiry skills to form questions about new ideas or information

## A Little More Background

to be an accomplished piano player, you would have to spend years learning skills and practicing them daily. You could not get better by watching a concert pianist, listening to piano music, or reading about how people play the piano; you would have to do it yourself. Likewise to be a good critical thinker, you must practice thinking critically.

To become a skilled critical thinker requires not only regular practice, but also an understanding of potential roadblocks in our brains that inhibit true critical thinking. Let’s imagine that your brain is a large filter through which information you receive must pass. Depending on your life experiences – how **were you** raised, what you believe, your personality, your values, what you’ve been taught – your “filter” alters the way you interpret incoming information, which leads to assumptions and inferences. **Assumptions** are things we take for granted or presuppose – they are ways of thinking that we accept without noticing, and **inferences** are conclusions our minds make in different circumstances. Here’s an example to illustrate how two people can assume and infer differently in the same situation:



*To begin thinking about your thinking, consider the following questions:*



- Does society determine what you think?
- How do you make decisions? What influences them?
- What is the process you use to interpret your surroundings and experiences?
- What is your mindset?
- To what extent is your mindset influenced by your culture?
- Are you in any sense in control of your thinking?

**Pick one of the above questions and write a response. Share responses with a partner and discuss.**



Read the verses listed below. How do they help guide one’s critical thinking? How do the verses relate to the William James quote? “A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.”

*“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil; for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart.” Luke 6:45*

*“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.” Psalm 19:14*

*“My mouth will speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart will be understanding.” Psalm 49:3*

*“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” 2 Corinthians 10:5*

Let’s examine the difference between critical thinking and biblical thinking. Critical thinking is the process of evaluating and considering different perspectives before a position is taken or a decision is made. Biblical thinking is studying God’s word and praying for complete understanding of God’s perspective before taking action.

Here are the three steps one should take to begin biblical thinking:

1. Pray; and think through the issue
2. Study; do as Paul says to Timothy (2 Timothy 2:15) “Be diligent study to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the Word of Truth.”
3. Practice; put what you are learning to immediate use. Remember this verse and let it guide you. Psalm 119:9 “How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to Your Word.”