

Socrates.
(470–399 BC)
Greek philosopher from Athens who is credited as the founder of Western philosophy and among the first moral philosophers of the ethical tradition of thought

I know you won't believe me,
but the highest
form of Human Excellence
is to question oneself
and others.

**MY SUCCESS IS YOUR
SUCCESS**

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CRITICAL THINKING

No matter where you live, what industry interests you, or what experience you've already had, we've all seen firsthand the importance of critical thinking.

In fact, the lack of such skills can truly make or break a person's career, as the consequences of their inability to process and analyze information effectively can be massive.

The ability to think critically is more important today than it has ever been. It's all on the line if we don't all learn to think more critically.

If people can't think critically, they not only reduce their chances of moving up the ladder in their respective industries, not only they also become easily susceptible to things like fraud and manipulation.

With that in mind, you're probably wondering what you can do to make sure you're not one of those people.

Developing your critical thinking is something that requires the most concentrated work.

It may be best, to begin by exploring the definition of critical thinking and the skills it includes.

Once you've done that, you can then venture on to the all-important question: how can I improve?



I will point out to you that this is not an easy task. So below you can break down the basics of critical thinking, to hone your skills and become a better critical thinker.

What is critical thinking?

Even if you want to be a better critical thinker, it's hard to improve what you can't define. Critical thinking is the analysis of a problem or situation and related facts, data, or evidence. Ideally, critical thinking should be conducted objectively, that is, without being influenced by feelings, opinions, or biases. It focuses only on factual information.

Critical thinking is a skill that allows you to make logical, informed decisions as well as you can. For example, a child who has not yet developed such skills may believe that the tooth fairy left money under his pillow based on stories, his parents told him. A critical mind, however, can quickly conclude that the existence of such a thing is unlikely, even if there are a few dollars under their pillow.

Although there is no universal standard for the skills included in the critical thinking process, below you will find a basic critical thinking process.

1. *Identification*: the first step in the critical thinking process is to identify the situation or problem and the factors that may influence it. Once you have a clear picture of the situation and the people, groups, or factors that can be influenced, you can then begin to dig deeper into a problem and its potential solutions.

For example, a new situation, question, or scenario, pause to take a mental inventory of the state of affairs by asking yourself the following questions:

- Who does what ?
- What seems to be the reason for this?
- What are the end results and how might they change?

2. *Conduct research*: when comparing arguments on an issue, independent research ability is essential. The arguments are persuasive. This means that the facts and figures presented in their favor could lack context or come from dubious sources. The best way to combat this is through independent verification, to find the source of the information and assess it.

For example, it can be helpful to develop a sense of doubt about un-sourced claims. Does the person making the argument, indicate where they got this information from?

If you ask or try to find it yourself and there is no clear answer, this should be seen as a red flag. It is also important to know that not all sources are equally valid. So, take the time to learn the difference between the different sources, in order to have a clearer picture.

3. *Identify biases*: this skill can be extremely difficult, as even the smartest among us may not recognize bias. Strong critical thinkers do their best to objectively evaluate information. Think of yourself as a judge in that you want to weigh the claims of both sides of an argument, but you'll also need to keep in mind any biases each side may have.



It is equally important, and arguably more difficult, to learn to put aside your biases that may cloud your judgment. Have the courage to debate and discuss your own thoughts and assumptions. This is essential for learning to see things from different angles.

You should be aware that there are biases. When evaluating information or an argument, ask yourself the following questions:

- Who does this benefit?
 - Does the source of this information seem to have an agenda?
 - Does the source overlook, ignore or does she leave out information that does not support their beliefs or claims?
 - Does this source use unnecessary language to influence the public's perception of a fact?
4. *The deduction:* the ability to infer and draw conclusions based on the information presented to you is another important skill for mastering critical thinking. Information is not always accompanied by a summary that explains what it means. You will often need to evaluate the information provided and draw conclusions based on raw data.

The ability to infer allows you to extrapolate and discover potential outcomes when evaluating a scenario. It is also important to note that not all deductions will be correct. For example, if you read that a person weighs 260 pounds, you can assume that they are overweight or unhealthy. However, other data points like height and body composition can alter this conclusion.

An inference is an educated guess, and your ability to infer correctly can be honed by making a conscious effort to gather as much information as possible before jumping to conclusions.

When you are faced with a new scenario or situation to assess, first try to look for clues, things like titles, pictures, and prominent statistics, and then make it a point to ask yourself what you think is going on.

5. *The determination of relevance:* one of the hardest parts of thinking critically during a difficult scenario is figuring out what information is most important to consider. In many scenarios you will be presented with information that may seem important, but it may just be a minor data point to consider.

The best way to better determine relevance is to establish a clear direction in what you are trying to understand.

Are you in charge of finding a solution?
Should we identify a trend?

If you determine your end goal, you can use it to inform your judgment of what is relevant. However, even with a clear objective, it can be difficult to determine what information is really relevant.

One strategy to combat this is to make a physical list of data points ranked in order of relevance. When you parse it this way, you'll likely end up with a list that includes some obviously relevant information at the top of your list, in addition to some points at the bottom



that you can probably ignore. From there, you can focus on the less clear topics that reside in the middle of your list for further evaluation.

6. *Curiosity*: it's incredibly easy to sit back and take anything presented to you for cash, but it can also be a recipe for disaster when faced with a storyline that requires critical thinking.

It might seem like an inquisitive mind is just something you're born with, practice stimulating that curiosity in a productive way.

All it takes is a conscious effort to ask open-ended questions about the things you see in your day-to-day life, and then you can invest time in following up on those questions.

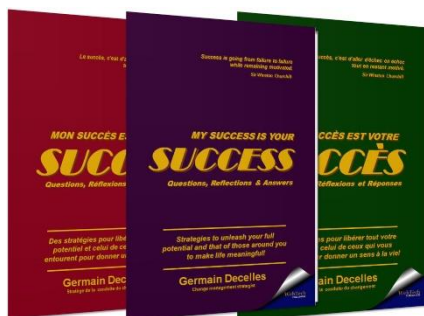
Being able to ask open-ended questions is an important skill to develop and even more so to be able to probe deeper.

Remember, thinking critically is vital for anyone looking to achieve career success and a successful life. Your ability to objectively analyze and evaluate complex topics and situations will always come in handy.

Confronted with a situation think of the Greek philosopher Socrates suggestion « I know you won't believe me, but the highest form of Human Excellence is to question oneself and others. »

Find out more about « critical thinking » with *My Success Is Your Success*. The book through questions, quotes and reflections provides the necessary elements to explore yourself so to shape your success and help those around you do the same. Remember that success is all about team efforts!

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This 404-page book, available in French and English, is the fruit of forty years of experience acquired with local and international organizations and companies and during consultancy, change management, transition, and marketing services. For more information and to consult the flipbook, go to: www.webtechpublishing.com .



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In addition to writing, Germain Decelles acts as Change Management Strategist. He has over 40 years of business and consultation experience with local and international markets, including sectors such as retail trade, distribution, information technology and communications, transportation, manufacturing, financial services, and government organizations.



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— 30 —