

# How To Develop Critical Thinking Skills

**By Indeed Editorial Team**

You will often see critical thinking skills listed on job postings since several professions value them highly. These include jobs within the legal, medical, financial and technology fields. Critical thinking skills also have broad life application for making decisions or evaluating things you read or hear. In this article, we will explore what critical thinking skills are and how you can develop them.

## **What are critical thinking skills?**

Critical thinking skills enable you to analyze information and process it rationally to help you determine the value of that information or make a decision. When you apply critical thinking to an idea or situation, you focus on facts, account for biases, consider a variety of perspectives and come to a conclusion based on that process. It is important to critical thinking that you are willing to be open-minded and subject your own thinking to critical analysis to be sure you are being fair and reasonable.

Critical thinking skills come easily to some people, but anyone can develop them and everyone can improve them.

# How to develop critical thinking skills

Here are some ways you can develop your critical thinking skills:

## 1. Ask questions

Asking basic questions can help to bring clarity to a situation or help you think through new information. The kind of questions you should ask include:

- Where did this information come from?
- Who benefits from this?
- What are you trying to demonstrate? What is the purpose?
- Are you overlooking something?

Also question your assumptions. Everyone makes assumptions based on experience or knowledge, but sometimes those assumptions are flawed. You want to be sure the assumptions upon which you are evaluating the information are correct as best as you can determine. And sometimes there is no good reason for an assumption. Challenging that assumption can lead to discoveries or different ways of solving a problem.

## 2. Be self-aware

First, be honest with yourself about your own biases. If the information comes from a source that often holds a different viewpoint to yours, you may be tempted to treat the information with suspicion. Acknowledging this bias allows you to evaluate the information on its own merit, not based on the source.

You may also hold to unreasonable stereotypes or other presuppositions that can affect the way you evaluate information or a situation. Recognizing and accounting for these presuppositions can help you fairly treat the information.

## 3. Evaluate opposing views

For many opinions and ideas, some take a different, even opposing, viewpoint. You can develop your critical thinking skills by looking for those dissenting opinions and evaluating them for yourself. Doing this gives you a broader perspective and helps you make better quality decisions.

Another way to do this is to discuss the information or situation with a group of friends who have different life experiences from yours. They may agree with your thoughts, but they will likely raise objections or suggest thoughts you had not considered. Even if the discussion turns into a friendly argument, you might find greater clarity on the topic during the debate.

#### **4. Consider consequences**

As best as you can with the information you have, consider the consequences of a line of reasoning or a particular decision. Think about the way those consequences change if you make a different decision or change your reasoning. Consider all the angles you can, looking at the situation not only from your perspective but the perspectives of everyone else affected by the decision. List the pros and cons based on what you foresee happening if you go ahead with your plan. This will help you make a better, more informed decision.

#### **5. Reverse your thinking**

One way to help you think about things differently is to reverse your thinking. Instead of A coming from B, consider how the situation would change if B came from A. Or instead of considering how A affects B, consider how B affects A. This may not provide you with an immediate solution, but it forces you to change perspective and could suggest a different way to approach a problem.

In the case of a dispute between people, reversing the situation might help you see things from the other person's viewpoint. This is often a good way to resolve conflicts.

### **Tips for developing critical thinking skills**

Here are some suggestions to help you develop your critical thinking skills:

#### **Read widely**

Books, both fiction and non-fiction, are a great source of thoughts, opinions and ideas, many of which are different than yours or new to you. Reading widely exposes you to these alternative viewpoints and helps you think more critically.

#### **Practice empathy**

Learning to empathize with others, imagining yourself in their situation, can help you see situations from a different perspective. This can give you a broader perspective on situations than just your own and help you develop a more informed opinion.

#### **Think for yourself**

As you evaluate different perspectives, take the time to understand each viewpoint and argument so you can make up your own mind on the subject. Whatever opinion you come to, whether it is one you heard or read or one you evaluated for yourself, make sure you can confidently own that opinion.

### **Practice active listening**

When someone is sharing their thoughts with you, resist the temptation to think about how you will respond while the person is speaking. Listen carefully to what they say and make sure you understand their thought before you respond. This will also help you develop empathy.

### **Consider you might be wrong**

It is normal for most people to begin with the assumption that their opinions about something are correct. After all, that's why they hold those opinions. To develop critical thinking, start with the idea that you are wrong. Doing this can help you be more receptive to different viewpoints.

### **Be inquisitive**

The more you know, the less likely you are to be misled by bad information. If you read something that sounds plausible, you can better evaluate its plausibility if you know something about that subject. Libraries and the internet offer you plenty of opportunities to satisfy your inquiring mind.

### **Exercise your body and mind**

Find ways to exercise your mind every day, either by solving a problem or working on puzzles. Daily physical exercise can also help improve your brain function, as can eating healthy food.