Strengthen Your Thinking Skills

Your brain is like a muscle—it needs to be exercised regularly and used often! Here are three different approaches to thinking. Practice one or all three!

1. Think Analytically
   - Gather information.
   - Break information into smaller parts.
   - Examine and evaluate. Does the information support your ideas? Is it factual, or opinion? Does the cause lead to a plausible effect? Does bias exist here? How can this information help you?

2. Think Creatively
   - Try brainstorming, by yourself or with a group.
   - Look at things from a new angle.
   - Be curious. Don’t be afraid to ask yourself “what if...?”
   - Don’t rush; faster isn’t always better, and it is ok to make mistakes.

3. Think Practically
   - Learn from every experience. Ask yourself what worked well, what didn’t, and what can you do to be better next time?
   - Apply what you learn to new situations. How is this similar to what you experienced before? How is it different?
   - Work toward your goals. How can your experiences help you accomplish your goals?

Critical thinking is the ability to think for yourself and to reliably and responsibly make the decisions that affect your life.

It involves a wide range of skills and attitudes, including:

- identifying other people’s positions (arguments and conclusions)
- evaluating the evidence for alternative points of view
- weighing up opposing arguments and evidence fairly
- being able to read between the lines, seeing behind surfaces, and identifying false or unfair assumptions
- recognizing techniques use to make certain positions more appealing than others
- reflecting on issues in a structured way
- drawing conclusions about whether arguments are valid and justifiable, based on good evidence and sensible assumptions
- synthesizing information drawing together your judgments of the evidence, synthesizing these to inform your own new position
- presenting a point of view in a structured, clear, well-reasoned way that convinces others

Adapted from Critical Thinking Skills, Developing Effective Analysis and Argument, 2011.