

# Critical Thinking

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# What does 'being critical' mean?

It does NOT mean 'say something negative about X'.

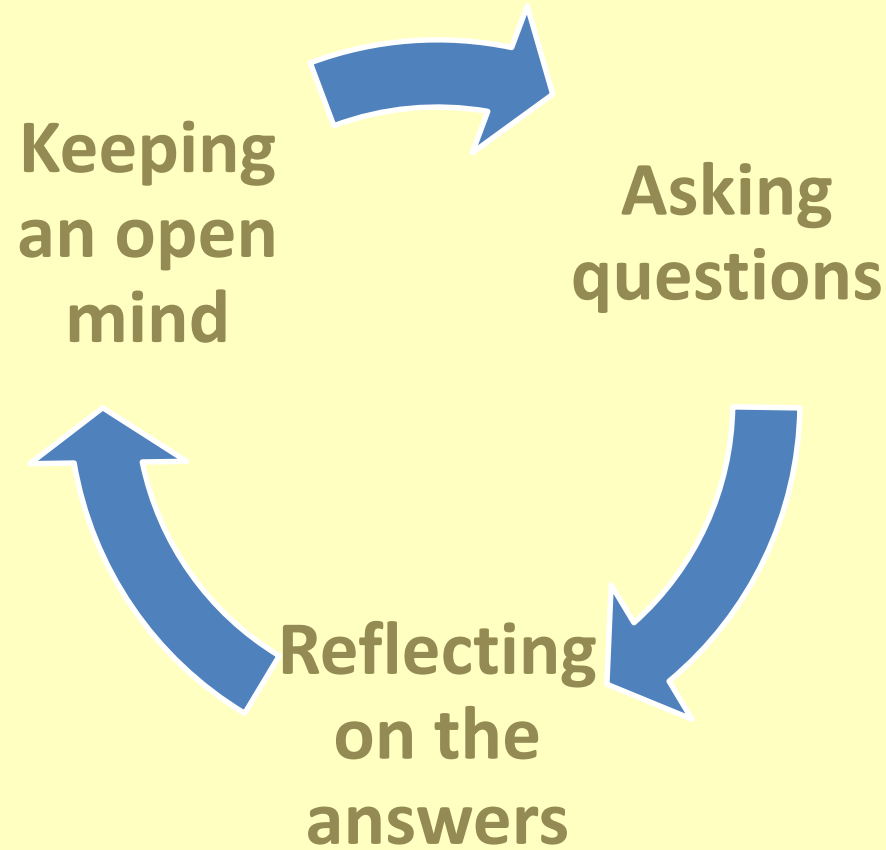
It means **asking questions** of the text /author/ issue under discussion and reflecting on the answers.

# What is 'critical thinking'?

- Actively seeking all sides of an argument
- Testing the soundness of claims made
- Testing the soundness of the evidence used to support the claims

*Do this for other people's arguments, as well as your own.*

# Critical thinking: an iterative process



# Critical Thinking

*“It isn’t enough just to understand; you have to be **constantly evaluating** whether something is accurate, whether it gets to the heart of the issue, whether it is the **most important** aspect on which to focus, whether it is the best example to use – and whether what you are saying about it is a **fair** representation of it.”*

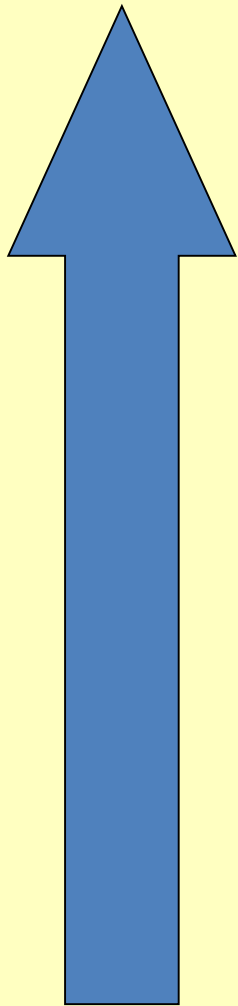
Cottrell (2011:7)

# Why is critical thinking important?

- The aim of academic work is to be:
  - objective
  - truthful
- Makes us better placed to identify and evaluate evidence which is presented, logical reasoning and underlying values and assumptions and so **take informed action**.
- We need to be aware of **our own** preconceptions and values if we are to be as objective as possible.

# What is learning?

## Bloom's Taxonomy



Evaluation

Synthesis

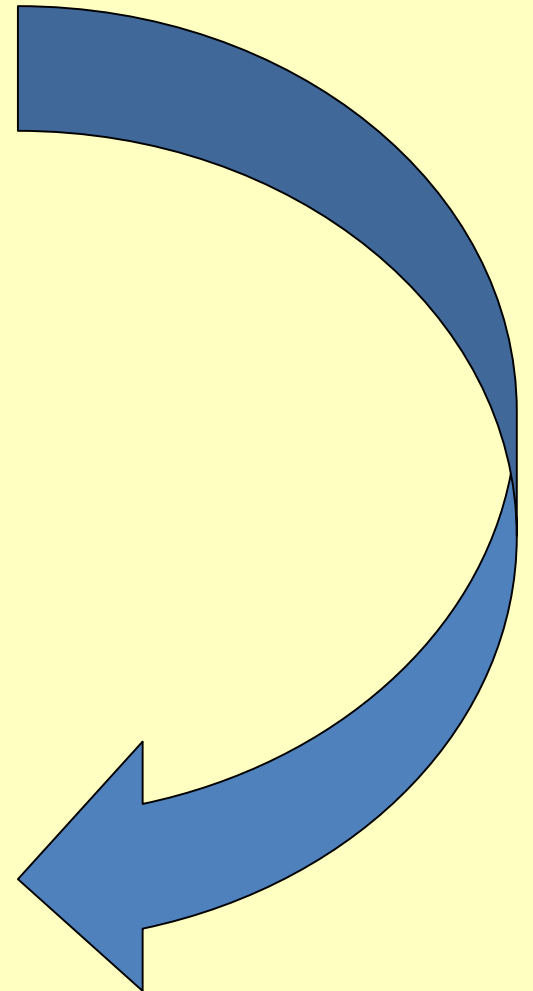
Analysis

Application



Understanding

Knowledge



# How can you become a better critical thinker?

- Keep a learning journal
- Actively engage with feedback
- Play devil's advocate
- Share your work with different people: experts and non-experts
- Think creatively: bring in new elements and consider the implications





**Where do you need to  
think critically in your  
studies?**

# Four elements to critical thinking

- Hunting assumptions
- Checking assumptions
- Seeing things from different viewpoints
- Taking informed action

(Brookfield, 2012)

# Assumptions

- **Causal**

“If I do X then Y will happen.”

- **Prescriptive**

“This is what I think ought to happen in this particular situation.”

- **Paradigmatic assumptions**

“This is how I think the world is structured.”

(Brookfield, 2012)

*‘Assumptions are rarely right or wrong - they are [more or less] contextually appropriate.’ (p.21)*

# Assumptions: examples

## Causal

“If I work hard, I will get a better mark.”

## Prescriptive

“People should apologise if they are late.”

## Paradigmatic

“With the development of society...”

# The interrelationship between assumptions

**SITUATION:** Helen fails an exam.

*Helen thinks: "If I had worked harder, I would have passed."*

(**Causal** assumption)

*Helen thinks: "I should have worked harder to pass my exam."*

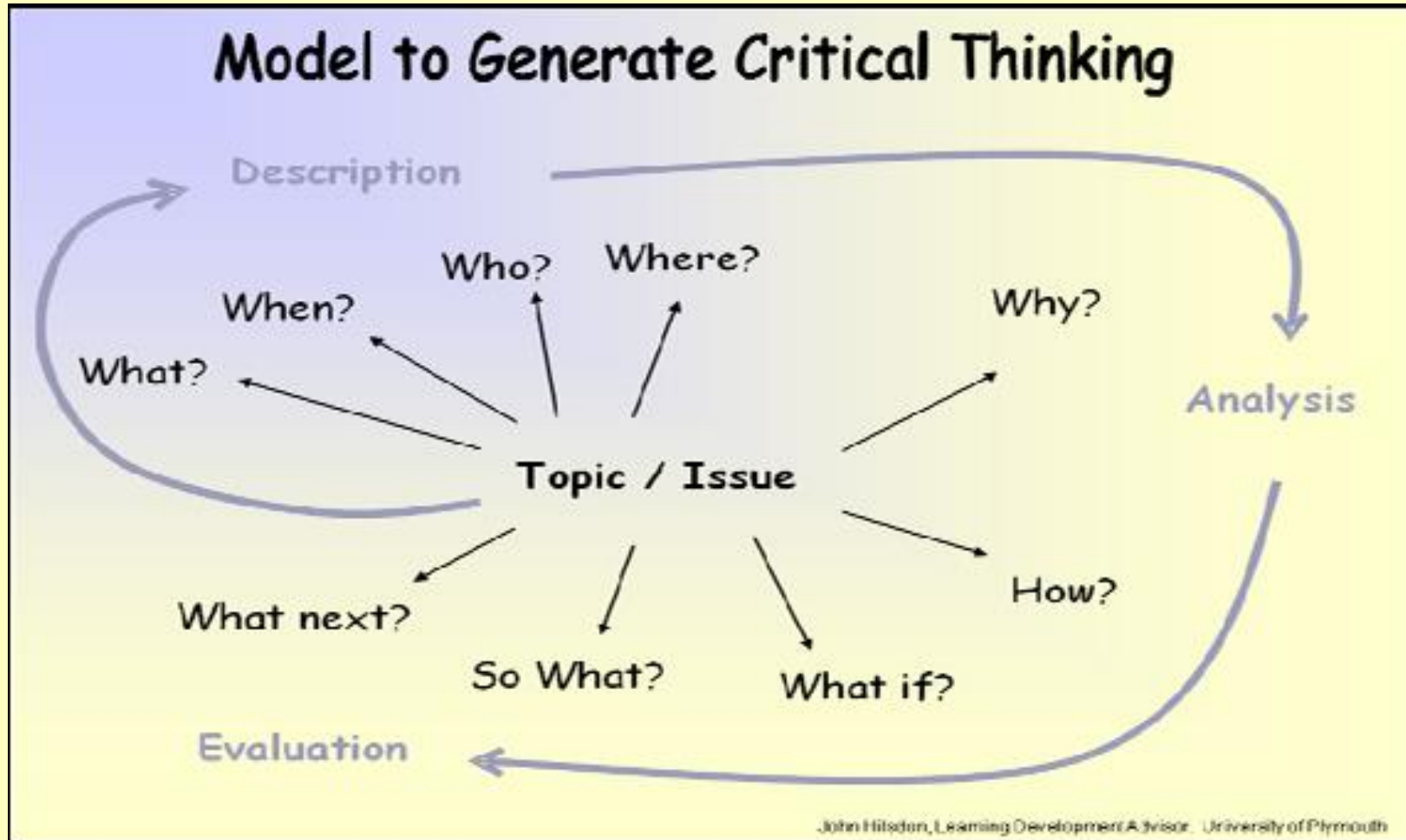
**Prescriptive** assumption, but based in Helen's **paradigmatic** assumption that:

*Success in exams depends on hard work.*

This implies that Helen thinks it is purely her own fault she failed, and that she believes that, with hard work, success will follow.

In other words, Helen assumes that there is nothing else that influences the possibility of success.

# Model to generate Critical Thinking



# Critical Reading

What questions can you ask of a text to engage with it critically?

# Critical reading: questions to ask

- Who is the author? What is the source? Is the source credible?
- What is the main idea or general message? What specifically am I asked to believe/accept?
- What specific evidence does the author cite in support of his/her position?
- Is this evidence valid and convincing? If not, what other evidence would I need in order to be satisfied with the conclusions drawn?



# Critical reading: questions to ask

- Are there any alternative explanations warranted by the evidence available?
- What are the main ideas that I have learned from this book/article?
- How do these ideas/findings fit in with what I already know?

# Task: 'Why we're drinking for Britain'

- What claim is being made by the article?
- What evidence is the claim based on?
- What questions could you ask to critically analyse the evidence upon which the claim is based?

# Further reading

Cottrell, S. (2011) *Critical Thinking Skills*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dantec, C. (2007) *Critical and Analytical Thinking*.  
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(Last accessed: Oct 2016)

Wallace, M. & Wray, A. (2016). *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates* (3<sup>rd</sup> edn). London. Sage.

<https://study.sagepub.com/wallaceandwray3e>

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[www.learningdevelopment.plymouth.ac.uk](http://www.learningdevelopment.plymouth.ac.uk)

# Learning Enhancement Team



Develop strategies to improve your:

- **study skills**
- **mathematics and statistics**
- **academic writing**
- **use of English**

## Resources

Study guides, videos, webcasts and worksheets on our website

## Workshops

Group sessions, delivered centrally or embedded in degree programmes

## Tutorials

Expert tuition to help you study more effectively and improve your work

# What we offer

- **Drop-ins**      Mon-Thurs, 4-5pm (10 minutes)
- **Tutorials**      Available by appointment (50 minutes)
- **Workshops**    In Schools or centrally organised
- **Resources**
  - Website <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/student-support-service/learning-enhancement>  
(Study guides, webcasts, links to other resources)
  - Blackboard:** 'Learn' tab -> 'Learning Enhancement Team'

# How can you contact us?

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