

FDC Quick Start

Fostering Critical Thinking

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All disciplines require students to develop critical thinking, but critical thinking develops slowly, and schooling practices often work against its development. Here's how to focus on critical thinking.

Critical Thinking Defined: A set of dispositions, thinking skills, and monitoring efforts aimed toward forming and judging claims based on evidence

- **Dispositions:** Inquisitiveness, open-mindedness, fair-mindedness, flexibility, respect for diverse viewpoints
- **Skills:** Analyzing claims, evidence; making inferences using reasoning; identifying assumptions; evaluating using evidence
- **Monitoring efforts:** Checking one's attention, goals, progress; adjusting based on results

Seven Promising Practices for Fostering Critical Thinking

1. **Stating outcomes:** Using observable verbs, state in explicit terms what students will be able to do at the end of your session (course, program). This helps students monitor progress toward the goal, and important component of metacognition.
2. **I Wonder:** Keep track of students' questions in learning logs and in some public place. Honor students' questions (rather than answers) in order to support the perhaps the most important disposition of all: Inquisitiveness and desire to know.
3. **Changing Classroom Discourse Patterns:** Break out of the lower-level, teacher-centered discourse patterns that predominate and encourage passive reception of information. Use discussion of intriguing prompts. Use questions that are likely to encourage responses beyond simple recall: Compare. Which is better? Who disagrees and why? Talk less. Teach students conversational skills for accountable talk. Use longer wait time after asking a question (at least five seconds) and before responding to a reply.
4. **Learning logs:** Use ongoing, brief, analytical and reflective writings that are primarily purpose of the learning (not formal assessment). Ask students to analyze their thinking as they revisit their log entries. Learning logs can help you foster any component of critical thinking, depending on the prompts you and your students choose.
5. **Quick Scan: Self assessment:** Present lists of terms, skills, facts, concepts, names, or other content to be mastered. Ask students to rate their current level of mastery (+, √, -) and set goals based on their analysis.
6. **Visual Thinking Strategy: What Do You See that Makes you Think So?** Present an image, table, figure, press piece, or other text that deserves close analysis. Ask, "What is going on here?" then "What do you see that makes you think so?" Respond without emotion. Keep the discussion going by asking, "What more can you find?" This strategy works with all levels and is effective for practicing evidence-based reasoning. (VTShome.org)
7. **Prompts for Critical Reading Responses:** Ask for more than simple comprehension of readings. Some examples:
 - Summarize 5 major points made in this chapter. Identify an individual you believe would disagree with these points. Write the reactions and counterarguments of this individual to the major points you identified.
 - Discuss the essence of this chapter using a metaphor.
 - Explain the chapter to your neighbor, who has a high school education and has not been in the work force for 15 years. How would your explanation differ if you were explaining the reading to your adolescent studies professor? Why, and what assumptions did you make when you were developing each explanation?
 - How might the information you gained from this reading affect your life personally and professionally?

