**Course Introduction**

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Welcome to Critical Reasoning.

What is it? Let’s start by defining critical thinking as disciplined, self-directed thinking.

The careful, deliberate determination of whether we should accept, reject, or suspend judgement about a claim and of the degree of confidence with which we should accept or reject it. The ability to think critically is vitally important, in fact our lives depend on it. The way we conduct our lives depends on what we believe to be true — on what claims we accept. The more carefully we evaluate a claim and the more fully we separate issues that are relevant to it from those that are not, the more critical is our thinking.

What is it? In everyday language, it is thinking “outside” the box, thinking about thinking, “unlimited” thinking, and divergent thinking.

What is it? It is the ability to think clearly and rationally. It includes the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking.

What are the basic critical thinking skills we need? It is knowing when someone is taking a position on an issue, which means knowing what the issue is, and what the person’s claim is about it. It is knowing what considerations are relevant to the issue. It is knowing whether the reasoning (if any) underlying the person’s claims is good reasoning. It is knowing whether, everything considered, we should accept, reject, or suspend judgment on what the person claimed. It is being levelheaded and objective and not being influenced by extraneous factors.

Someone with critical thinking skills is able to do the following:

- understand the logical connections between ideas
- identify, construct, and evaluate arguments
- detect inconsistencies and common mistakes in reasoning
- solve problems systematically
- identify the relevance and importance of ideas
- reflect on the justification of one’s own beliefs and values

Critical thinking is not a matter of accumulating information. A person with a good memory and who knows a lot of facts is not necessarily good at critical thinking. A critical thinker is able to deduce consequences from what he knows, and he knows how to make use of information to solve problems, and to seek relevant sources of information to inform himself.

Critical thinking should not be confused with being argumentative or being critical of other people. Although critical thinking skills can be used in exposing fallacies and bad reasoning, critical thinking can also play an important role in cooperative reasoning and constructive tasks. Critical thinking can help us
acquire knowledge, improve our theories, and strengthen arguments. We can use critical thinking to enhance work processes and improve social institutions.

Some people believe that critical thinking hinders creativity because it requires following the rules of logic and rationality, but creativity might require breaking the rules. This is a misconception. Critical thinking is quite compatible thinking “outside” the box, challenging consensus, and pursuing less popular approaches.

Creative thinkers ask,

- What would exist that does not exist now?
- What would be happening that does not happen now?
- What accomplishments would be in place that are not now?

Creative thinkers also ask,

- **HOW can we**

Richard Paul’s definition of critical thinking fits what we will be doing this term:

- Critical thinking is thinking about your thinking, while you’re thinking, in order to make your thinking better.