Critical Thinking Skills

What They Are and Why You Must Develop Them!

To *think critically* is to actively evaluate and intelligently apply information you possess or encounter – to reconsider *everything* you read, hear, see, and *think you know* – all in an effort to discover the truth!

Any information can contain any number of defects. If you're not aware of that fact, you may reach conclusions or take actions based on erroneous or incomplete ideas. By developing critical thinking skills, you can make more informed decisions and achieve deeper understanding of yourself and the world.

Information exists everywhere. A percentage of that information can be incomplete, possibly inaccurate. Innocent mistakes (misinformation) such as typographical errors often occur. There are also individuals and organizations who, for various reasons, deliberately perpetuate lies (disinformation) or partial truths. It is unsafe to assume any information is complete and accurate.

What can you do? Evaluate all information you come across as much as necessary to come to the best possible determination. How do you do this? Read on!

Here are the kinds of questions you should ask whenever you encounter information:

- *Does the information completely and objectively satisfy my needs? If so, why not?*
- *Is the provider of the information qualified to distribute it?*
- *Is the information current or outdated? If so, can newer information be found elsewhere?*
- *Is there any evidence of prejudice or unfairness?*
- *Are subjective statements presented instead of facts?*
- *Is the information propaganda or an advertisement?*
- *What was the person or organization's purpose or motive in providing this information?*
- *Is the information telling the whole truth or just one side of the story?*
- *Are there better sources of information elsewhere?*

When conducting research online, remember that anyone can publish information on the Internet and present it in a seemingly professional and convincing manner. How can you tell? The problem is you might not be able to recognize the problem immediately or at all.

Beyond asking questions, you should also consult more than one source in order to understand a topic from different points of view and to compare the "facts" as you receive them. There are entire books and online databases that explore issues from different perspectives. Members of Middletown Thrall Library can access the online database *Opposing Viewpoints* through our web site at **www.thrall.org/databases**

Above all, you should consult your local library to make sure you are seeking out the best possible information currently available. A librarian will help you locate relevant publications, organizations, and other definitive resources to help you precisely and promptly find answers to your questions. The information you need *might not be online* after all, but it is very likely available through your local library!

For even more help on developing your critical thinking skills, please speak with a librarian or visit our free online tutorial at **www.thrall.org/criticalthinking**

Please remember: the popular saying "information is power" can only be true when the information you are working with is of the highest quality possible! Empower yourself through heightened awareness and by applying critical thinking skills to all information you encounter on and beyond the web.