

Critical Thinking

Description: Critical Thinking is the ability to analyze and evaluate information on a deeper level than simply the surface with which you are presented. This can involve evaluating, questioning forming arguments, debating, comparing, and contrasting. Activities that support critical thinking are those in which students are asked to make sense of what they have discovered and learned through the activities they completed.

Elaboration: Someone who struggles with thinking critically may react emotionally, flip flop opinions depending on the group, repeat same mistake over and over, and/or have difficulty connecting cause and effect. Someone who thinks critically applies information to real-life experiences, reacts with a logical thought process, analyzes answers and what others say, and forms his/her own opinion. Students who do not think critically will often only think on surface level and rarely ask questions, look for patterns, form opinions based on evidence about an issue. However, all students are capable of thinking critically with the right coaching.

Strategies:

Role-Playing: Use role-playing in the learning environment. This helps students to see issues from multiple perspectives by taking on different roles.

Ask Open-Ended Questions: Make sure to use questions that require deeper level thinking, such as ‘why do you think this happens?’ ‘Evaluate this issue’ ‘Compare and contrast these two things’ etc.

Journaling: Have students journal their thoughts to allow students to process their experiences and reflect. Reflection is key to critical thinking and thinking below surface level information.

Small group problem-solving activities: Have students problem-solve in small groups to encourage critical thinking through generating ideas for possible solutions and evaluating group members’ ideas. Let students discuss topics amongst themselves, rather than lecturing in authoritative manner.

Recognize Critical Thinking: Show links between what students are learning and what they have previously learned to encourage synthesis of information. Acknowledge and express appreciation for students thinking critically.

Connecting Activities to Students’ Lives: Relate content and activities to students’ lives and experiences to increase critical thinking and meaning making.

Debriefs: Debrief activities or lessons to provide time and space to reflect and allow students to make connections about what s/he noticed and learned. It is also important to debrief incidents and conflict. There are endless opportunities for debrief. For example, walking to an activity, cleaning up after lunch, asking what did we do well or what could be improved, etc.

Critical Thinking Rubric

Evidence Absent	Inconsistent Evidence	Reasonable Evidence	Compelling Evidence
1	2	3	4
<p>There is little or no evidence that facilitators are using strategies that allow students to build skills in critical thinking.</p>	<p>There is limited evidence that facilitators are using strategies that allow students to build skills in critical thinking.</p>	<p>There is substantial evidence that facilitators are using strategies that allow students to build skills in critical thinking.</p>	<p>There is consistent and meaningful evidence that facilitators are using strategies that allow students to build skills in critical thinking.</p>
<p>Facilitator doesn't use any strategies to build critical thinking.</p> <p>OR</p> <p>Facilitator uses a strategy in a negative way.</p> <p>For example, the facilitator pulls a student aside to debrief a conflict, but the conversation is dominated by the facilitator and is more of a lecture than a conversation that engages the student in critical thinking.</p>	<p>Facilitator uses 1 (maybe 2) strategies to build critical thinking, but not consistently or effectively.</p> <p>The facilitator may briefly prompt for a critical thinking, but may move on after one or two responses, so there is no sustained reflective activity.</p> <p>The facilitator may review what was learned, but the students passively paraphrase what happened during the activity or repeat what the facilitator reviewed.</p>	<p>Facilitator consistently and effectively uses 1 (maybe 2) strategies to build critical thinking.</p> <p>The facilitator uses prompts or questions to encourage critical thinking.</p> <p>Students' reflections include connections among ideas and attempts to explain concepts, but are still incomplete or inconsistent; or only a small subset of students show evidence of critical thinking.</p>	<p>Facilitator consistently and effectively uses 2 or more strategies to build critical thinking.</p> <p>Almost all students are actively reflecting on the content and making meaningful connections between the activities they participated in and concepts.</p>