Reading

There are four items to complete in this Reading area:

1. Reading
2. Challenge Activity
3. Powerful Words for a Powerful Vocabulary
4. Successories

I. Reading

Critical Thinking

When you think critically, you are evaluating all the information you have available, deciding what is true or not true, and making your own decisions about what you believe. In order to think critically, you must have the ability to use logic and reason. You must also be able to evaluate whether the information you receive is based on fact or opinion.

Everyone uses logic each day. When you are cold, you decide to put on a sweater. When you are tired, you decide to go to sleep. With every decision you make, there is a logical order of steps in the thinking process that you can follow.

Applying Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is an important part of being a successful student. Learning how to use logic and reason will give you the ability to evaluate information effectively, make decisions on where you stand on important issues, and help you support your own arguments. This will become increasingly important during Seminars, when posting to the Discussion Board, and while completing Assignments.
Four Steps to Improve Your Thinking

Step 1. Clarify your points
• Look for specific facts and truth.
• Do not agree or disagree with someone (author) unless you understand the information you have been given fully.
• Ask or look for examples to help you understand.
• Summarize and see if you can explain it to someone else clearly.

Step 2. Stick to the point
• Do not stray from the main focus of the conversation or topic.
• Keep your mind from wandering to related and then unrelated topics.
• Ask yourself how the smaller bits of information connect to the main focus of the conversation.

Step 3. Question Questions
• Do not just accept information — question it.
• If you do not understand something, ask questions.
• Think of what information you really need — have you asked the right questions?
• Can you look at the information through another point of view?

Step 4. Be Reasonable
• Be willing to listen, and to change your mind (It is okay to not be perfect).
• Identify language that might not be reasonable.
• Avoid becoming defensive or irritated.
• Be open to other points of view.

Source: www.criticalthinking.org

The Value of Critical Thinking

When you think critically, you are evaluating all the information you have available, deciding what is true or not true, and making your own decisions about what you believe. In order to think critically, you must have the ability to use logic and reason. You must be able to analyze the given information and research it for validity. You must also be able to evaluate whether the information you receive is
based on fact or opinion. Taking further creative action on the information and evaluating your final decision or action uses all of the components of critical thinking.

When you look at something logically, you begin the process of analysis. You use this logic every day in every part of your life. If you are cold, you put on more clothing; if you are approaching a situation that might be dangerous, you move in another direction, when you choose to eat a food a second time, it is because you have run an evaluation on its taste and decided that you liked it enough to eat it again.

Many areas of life, including your schooling, require that you stop and think; you actually become aware of the process of critical thinking and apply it to your daily life with purpose. This is a major component of the successful student. Using logic and reasoning (both critical thinking skills) will give you the ability to make decisions on where you stand on important issues and help you to support your arguments. You will see the importance of critical thinking as you engage in Seminars, in the Discussion Boards, and in writing your Assignments. Gathering data to support your statements makes all the difference in the world when it comes to sharing your creativity as your validity has now been enhanced by research.

**Critical Thinking in Academia**

In college you will be expected to do more than just read the material that is presented; you will be expected to read it, think critically about it by analyzing/researching, by evaluating it, and finally by creatively using it in your own unique way.

Although identifying statements as fact or opinion is part of critical thinking, it is only the beginning. Critical thinking is really an ongoing process of recalling, understanding, applying, analyzing, making judgments, and creating your own new thought or idea.

**For example:**

Frank tells his sister Cathy that her car needs servicing. She questions that her car really needs it, so decides to take it out for a drive. She notices a few odd noises and that the brake pedal is not as tight as it used to be. Realizing these are new problems, she decides to take the car in for servicing.

Take a look at the six levels of critical thinking as proposed by Dr. Benjamin Bloom. Dr. Bloom’s work was initially done in the 1950s and the power of his theory remains in full use today. In 2002, a team of educators proposed a revised taxonomy, which you will also view in this Reading.

The taxonomy is hierarchal. This simply means you must achieve mastery on the first level or step before you can successfully proceed to the second level or step and on up to level six, the highest level of critical thinking.
**Step One is called Knowledge.** This simply means you can recall something you know about the subject matter at hand. Apply this to Cathy as you continue. Cathy has plenty of prior knowledge regarding how a car should work correctly.

**Step Two is called Comprehension.** This means you can explain to someone without struggle the information with which you are working. Explaining is comprehension. Seeing that Cathy is very comfortable with her car, she can explain her properly working vehicle to us, or question concerns regarding her vehicle.

**Step Three is Application.** Application simply means to do it or use it. Cathy drives her car daily. She applies all she knows to the driving of her car.

Now, Frank, her brother, tells her he thinks something is wrong with it. She therefore must move up to level 4 in our critical thinking hierarchy.

**Step Four is Analysis.** Cathy now needs to do a comparison of the information she knows to the newly proposed information; that her car needs repair. Cathy needs to analyze the situation to determine if Frank’s suggestion is correct; her car needs service. She needs to research necessary applicable information relating to her car and her understanding of a car in good condition versus a car in need of repair. If she goes on Frank's opinion alone, she is not truly using all of her critical thinking levels and skills. Perhaps she will engage the service garage in an assessment on their part. Perhaps she will investigate pricing at several places. She may even investigate trading her car in for a newer model.

**Step Five (in the original Bloom’s Taxonomy) is synthesis.** This basically means gather all information and create your new plan.

Step Five (in the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy) guides you to make an evaluation based on the information gathered from your analysis and research. There is a great deal of neurological movement through many areas of the brain during the top three levels of the taxonomy, so keep in mind that you really do move between them all as you come to your final creation which is the ultimate goal of critical thinking.

Therefore, you evaluate, make a decision, make a recommendation, and debate a topic or decision based upon the data you have collected. Cathy is now ready to make her decision as to what to do about her car, if anything. Based upon the information you have been given here, you do not yet know what her decision will be. You do know that because of the time and effort she put into her decision, it will be her own decision, her own piece of the final creation (Anderson, 2001).

**Step Six (in the original Bloom’s Taxonomy) is evaluation.** As you can easily see, the revision simply switches the top two levels and renames synthesis as Create. The justification for this is found in the article referenced (Anderson, 2001).
Step Six (in the Revised Bloom’s Taxonomy) is create. Create is the top level of critical thinking, in which you take all of your thinking and turn it into your own production (whatever that might be). This vast array of possibilities is what creativity is all about. In the real world it is as simple as taking a recipe and switching up ingredients to please your own palate. It can as wonderful as the composition of a symphony. It can be so quick; that you do not even recognize you are in the create level of critical thinking. The more you engage in full critical thinking, the more rapidly and easily you create in your own fashion. Whenever you solve a problem you are in the create level. Whenever you do something new, you are in the create level. Some of the verbs that alert you to this top level of critical thinking include: create, design, develop, formulate, invent, write, visualize, and predict. Anything you do, in the creative problem-solving arena is considered to be at the top of the critical thinking hierarchy.

Returning to Cathy’s decision, now, she can make her decision on her own with full confidence that it was the correct decision. If, after choosing her way, she decides she is not happy with her creative decision and action, she will return to the drawing board the next time she has an automobile question or problem ahead of her. She will restart the process of analyzing, researching, evaluating, and creating her solution. You will revisit this process as you continue to strengthen your critical thinking skills, learning from your previous actions that did not come to fruition the way that you hoped that they would.

One of your greatest goals in life and learning should be continued engagement at the top level of critical thinking as much as humanly possible. By doing so, you will establish not only a habit of success, but also the engagement and empowerment of the critical thinking brain (cerebral cortex) and the de-escalating of the emotional/reactive brain (the amygdala) giving you the greatest opportunity for balance and excitement in life and in learning.

Reference


Research and Evaluation

It is important for you to know the difference between reliable sources of information and unreliable ones. A good way to increase your chances of finding reliable sources of information is to use academic and/or professional search engines. One such resource is the KU Online Library.

Take a few minutes to visit the KU Library by clicking the My Studies tab across the top of your KU Campus page and selecting the Library link from the dropdown list. Search the right-hand navigation bar for the Tips, Tricks, Handouts, and Help section. View helpful video tutorials included in this area.
There is a lot of valuable information on the Internet as well; however, there is also a lot of false information, opinions, inferences, and assumptions to watch out for as you are reviewing online sources. When researching online, you need to be able to discern which sites are “legitimate” and reliable sources for academic work.

**Step-by-Step Research on the Web**

The following step-by-step presentation shows you crucial tips for successfully finding information on the Web.

**General Tips:**

- Use keywords and
- Do not use not full sentences
- Do not worry about capitalization
- Spelling counts
- Narrow it down

In the presentation that follows, you will see specific tips and techniques for "narrowing it down."

**Scenario**

Why are you using the search engine?

In this scenario you live in Hays, Kansas and need to get your computer repaired. You have a PC, not a Mac®.

How do you find the information you need?

**Narrowing Your Search: Part 1**

**Put phrases in quotes:**

If you are looking to repair your computer, you would likely type in computer repair. The search engine assumes you are looking for any site with the word computer and repair. Narrow it down by typing the phrase with quotes:

“computer repair”
Result: The search engine will then show you just the sites with the phrase (where both words occur side-by-side), "computer repair."

Narrowing Your Search: Part 2

Use + to require something:

+hays +Kansas

Result: Only sites with Hays and Kansas will then be listed. (Note: Capitalization is optional.)

Narrowing Your Search: Part 3

Use - to cut out something:

-Mac

Result: Any site with Mac repair will then be eliminated.

Narrowing Your Search: Part 4

Combine commands:

“computer repair” +hays +Kansas -Mac

Important Note: Do not place spaces after the + or -, only between terms.

Result: Sites with the phrase, computer repair, and the words, Hays, and Kansas, but not the word, Mac.

Narrowing it Down: Sample Searches

Sample Searches at Google.com®:

The sample searches below illustrate how using the tips from this presentation will help you to narrow down your results to those that are important to you.

All of the results below are approximations of current Google search results.

computer repair = 16,800,000 results
“computer repair” = 9,090,000
“computer repair” +hays = 9,670
“computer repair” +hays +Kansas = 1,130
“computer repair” +hays +Kansas -mac = 458

Other Sample Searches

"baseball tickets" +Cubs +Wrigley +September
= 4,480 results

"computer chair" +delivery -leather
= 31,600 results

Sometimes you need to consider adding keywords or finding alternative ones, or you might just need to take the time to look through the first few pages of results of these longer lists.

Many search engines have advanced search options which can be of help as well.

Academic Resources

You will find many excellent academic resources located in the Kaplan Library. There is a direct link to the KU Online Library located in the Course Home area of your course. Check it out!

Please see the Doc Sharing area of the classroom for information on search engines, online web searching techniques and website evaluation strategies.

Appropriate Sources

KU does not allow the use of Wikipedia™ or other Wikis because these resources can be edited by anyone. Blogs and chat rooms may offer information for practical use, but are considered conversation and, therefore, not appropriate for research papers.

Applying Critical Thinking
You have just learned to find online resources, now look at how to make use of your critical thinking skills as you determine which sources are worthwhile.

**Evaluating Information**

Once you have located information, the next step is to determine (using your critical thinking skills) whether or not the information is appropriate to use. Visit the following website to read about the importance of thinking critically as you evaluate online sources: [http://www.schrockguide.net/uploads/3/9/2/2/392267/5ws.pdf](http://www.schrockguide.net/uploads/3/9/2/2/392267/5ws.pdf)

**The Five W's**

**The 5 W's: Who, What, Where, When, and Why while evaluating resources.**

Carefully consider the following items (described in more detail at the site listed on the previous page) as you evaluate online sources:

**Authority (Who):** Who is the author or sponsor and what are his/her credentials? Did the author/sponsor provide contact information?

**Accuracy (Where):** Where did the information come from? Are there citations and links to other websites?

**Objectivity (What):** What is the purpose of the site (inform, entertain, persuade, advertise, etc.)? Is the discussion fact-based or opinion-based?

**Currency (When):** When was the site originally created? Has it been recently updated? Are the links working?

**Coverage (Why):** Why is this site worthwhile? Is the site easy to navigate and does the information seem logical?

**Important Definitions**

**Tip:**
The following definitions will help you understand important concepts of critical thinking such as logic, fact, and opinion.

**Fact or Truth:** A statement that can be proven true.

Example: Many research studies have proven that “women live longer than men.” This statement can be proven true.
**Inference**: Arriving at a conclusion based loosely on facts that are known or assumed to be true.

Example: Upon seeing a woman carrying a briefcase at 8 am, you could infer that she is going to work. This may, or may not, be true.

**Assumption**: Taking the information for granted, supposing it is just the way it is supposed to be.

Example: You can assume that since Bob was hired as a computer expert, he will know the answers to your questions. This may, or may not, be true.

**Conjecture**: Guessing or making predictions based on incomplete information; it has not been proven.

Example: There is life on other planets. This may, or may not, be true.

**Opinion**: A personal judgment or shared belief; an attitude or viewpoint that may or may not be true.

Example: Some people believe that Macs are better than PCs. While some will agree and others disagree, a final agreeable truth will not be possible.

**Value**: Something desired by a person or group of people.

Example: Teenagers should watch less television. The word “should” is a clue in this statement; while some will agree and others disagree, a final agreeable truth will not be possible.

---

**II. Challenge Activity**

You can never learn enough about the power of critical thinking. As your challenge in Unit 6 and to further enrich your learning strategies go to the following site where you can find out more about thinking critically and creatively.


Apply these learning tools to decision making to realize stronger more enhanced learning. Continue to make connections as you move from unit to unit. Search for the strategies that you find most helpful to your learning and thinking processes. Begin to use them over and over as through repetition you will establish habits of success. Do not forget, you may always share your thoughts in Virtual Office or Discussion Board.
III. Powerful Words for a POWERFUL Vocabulary – 7 words in 7 Days

Effective communication is not only an essential academic strategy; it is fast becoming one of the top skills employers are looking for as they screen potential employees. However, how do you become an effective communicator? The answer to this question is actually quite simple, yet it involves some serious commitment on your part. You have to practice and make a firm commitment to equipping yourself with the many different “tools” that you will need in order to express your ideas clearly and effectively in both written and spoken communication. This is where a powerful vocabulary can make a world of difference for you because words are the building blocks of communication. Therefore, the more words you are able to use, the more creative, convincing, and powerful you will be as a communicator. What if you could add just one new word to your vocabulary each day? Think about the progress you would make in a week, a month, or even an entire year.

Vocabulary Enrichment Resources

Merriam-Webster’s Word of the Day
http://www.merriam-webster.com/word-of-the-day/

Activity: Make your own flashcards: http://quizlet.com/

Unit 4 Vocabulary Words

Complete the vocabulary activities here
http://www.studymate.com?id=3fnVMQ7uw

Reticent: Inclined to keep quiet; reserved; restrained.

Vagary: An extravagant, erratic, or unpredictable notion, action, or occurrence; a whim.

Apogee: The highest point.

Sanguine: Optimistic; cheerful.
Caveat: A warning or caution.

Diatribe: A bitter verbal attack.

Veracity: Truth; truthfulness.

IV. Successories

The information provided in the Successories area is designed to provide you with valuable tips, skills, and resources — all related to your ongoing success here at Kaplan and beyond.

This week, please take time to review the following brief tutorials:

Evaluating Research Sources from KU Writing Center http://khe2.acrobat.com/p42965381/

Finding and Evaluating Research Sources https://khe2.adobeconnect.com/_a769721248/p5jm0059mn3/

References

