



13: The Power of Critical Thinking

*A Lesson on Curiosity, Judgment, and Building a Competitive Advantage
Through Thoughtful Decisions*



Introduction for the Facilitator

In a world full of noise, complexity, and rapid change, **critical thinking** is one of the most essential **professional skills** a person can develop. It empowers learners to pause, assess, and make informed decisions rather than reacting emotionally or accepting things at face value.

This lesson helps college students and workforce learners understand that critical thinking is not about being skeptical or argumentative. It's about asking better questions, testing assumptions, and using logic and curiosity to move forward with clarity. It's a core part of a learner's **personal competitive advantage**, especially in jobs, teams, and industries that value problem-solving and innovation.

Whatever their ultimate career, a learner's ability to think critically strengthens everything they do.

This lesson will help adult learners of all ages to enhance their critical thinking skills. It includes:

- **A relatable Scenario to show critical thinking in action**
- **8 Guided Group Discussion Questions with follow-up questions**
- **8 Journal Prompts to consider why critical thinking is needed**
- **8 personal Skill-Building Strategies**
- **A printable Action Planner for reflection and application**



Scenario: One Click Away

Zayla, 26, is in a digital marketing apprenticeship. Her manager forwards a message labeled “urgent,” asking her to review a campaign ad that seems off-brand and includes unfamiliar links. Zayla almost clicks “approve,” but something feels off.

Instead, she asks: “Who sent this? Where did the content come from?” She checks with her manager, who doesn’t know anything about it. The message turns out to be a phishing attempt.

Because Zayla slowed down and thought critically before she acted, she protected her company and earned trust.



Guided Group Discussion Questions

1. **What does critical thinking mean in your own words?**
Follow-up: How is it different from overthinking?
2. **Why do people sometimes avoid thinking deeply or asking tough questions?**
Follow-up: How can we push through that discomfort?
3. **How does critical thinking show up in work, training, or college life?**
Follow-up: Why is it so valuable in those settings?
4. **How does critical thinking relate to your personal competitive advantage?**
Follow-up: What kind of reputation does a good thinker earn?
5. **What role do emotions play in critical thinking?**
Follow-up: How do we balance gut feelings with facts?
6. **What’s the danger in accepting information or instructions without questioning?**
Follow-up: When is it most important to ask, “Why?” or “What else could be true?”
7. **How can we challenge ideas or systems respectfully and constructively?**
Follow-up: What language or tone helps that land well?
8. **What’s a recent decision where more critical thinking would’ve helped?**
Follow-up: What would you do differently next time?



Journal Prompts

1. **What's one belief or habit you've questioned recently, and why?**
2. **When have you asked a tough question that led to a better outcome?**
3. **What's one area of your life where you want to think more critically?**
4. **Describe a time you made a quick decision and later wished you had paused.**
5. **What sources of information do you trust and how do you decide?**
6. **What helps you separate facts from opinions in conversations or content?**
7. **What patterns or biases do you want to become more aware of in your thinking?**
8. **How does building your critical thinking support your lifestyle and career goals?**



Skill-Building Strategies

1. **5-Question Filter:** Before acting, ask: What's the goal? What's the source? What's the risk? What are other options? What's missing?
2. **Devil's Advocate Drill:** Once a week, argue the opposite of a belief or decision to test its strength.
3. **Assumption Mapping:** For any problem, write out what you're assuming and challenge each one.
4. **Pause and Pattern Break:** When something feels urgent, pause. Then ask: Is this urgent or familiar?
5. **Socratic Practice:** Ask "Why?" three times in a row to dig deeper into reasoning.
6. **Bias Check-In:** When evaluating a decision, reflect: "What am I bringing to this that might skew how I see it?"
7. **Information Pyramid:** Organize facts (what you know), assumptions (what you think), and feelings (what you feel) before deciding.
8. **Feedback Loop:** Share your thinking with a peer or mentor and ask, "What's a blind spot I might be missing?"



Reflect and Prepare

Name: _____

What Is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking means analyzing, questioning, and evaluating ideas before jumping to conclusions. It helps you make smart decisions, solve problems, and build your personal competitive advantage.

Why This Matters to Me

Why is critical thinking important for your education, work, relationships, or lifestyle goals?

My Thinking Patterns

What helps me think clearly: _____

What clouds my judgment: _____

What situations make critical thinking harder for me: _____

Belief Shift

Circle or write a belief that supports stronger thinking:

"Smart decisions start with smart questions."

"I pause before I proceed."

"My mind is a tool—I sharpen it through practice."

"It's okay to change my mind when new facts appear."

Other: _____



Practice Plan + Progress

Name: _____

My 28-Day Thinking Focus

What thinking habit, strategy, or situation will you work on this month?

Where will you apply this? _____

How will you reflect on your growth?

☐ Thought journal ☐ Weekly review ☐ Peer feedback ☐ Mind map

Restart Plan

When I feel reactive or unclear, I will:

☐ Ask clarifying questions

☐ Write down the facts

☐ Use my anchor phrase: "Pause. Think. Decide."

☐ Other: _____

Weekly Reflection Prompts

1. When did I think critically this week and what was the result?

2. Where did I skip overthinking and how did that play out?

3. What questions helped me see something more clearly?

4. What will I ask, question, or try next week?

28-Day Critical Thinking Tracker

Focus area or habit: _____

Week 1 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

How did week 1 go? Circle one word:

✓ Curious ✓ Cloudy ✓ Focused
✓ Rushed ✓ Open-minded ✓ Strategic

Week 3 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

How did week 3 go? Circle one word:

✓ Curious ✓ Cloudy ✓ Focused
✓ Rushed ✓ Open-minded ✓ Strategic

Week 2 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

How did week 2 go? Circle one word:

✓ Curious ✓ Cloudy ✓ Focused
✓ Rushed ✓ Open-minded ✓ Strategic

Week 4 ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

How did week 4 go? Circle one word:

✓ Curious ✓ Cloudy ✓ Focused
✓ Rushed ✓ Open-minded ✓ Strategic