



PEARSON NEW INTERNATIONAL EDITION

Critical Reading, Critical Thinking:
Focusing on Contemporary Issues

R.Pirozzi G.Starks-Martin J.Dziewisz
Fourth Edition



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Think About It!

These two headline front pages report about New Orleans after the Katrina hurricane. They use the same picture but different headlines. What is the central message of each of these front pages? Do the messages differ because of the headlines? What about the choice of a second photo in each case? Share your thoughts with other students in your class.

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Fresno-area home prices witness the 19th-largest increase in the nation. Business, C1

The Fresno Bee
FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2005
30 cents

Valley cracks \$3 mark at pump
Gasoline prices are likely to keep rising, observers say.

City desperate for help
► Evacuation turns 'explosive' ► Hospital patients stranded ► Refugees clamor for aid



As horror intensifies, Louisiana officials deny lack of federal assistance
By David A. Thayer and Robert Smith
New Orleans

Doctors plead for help amid violent chaos
By Jennifer Reardon
New Orleans

Fresno agency seeks more eminent domain power
By John Ellis
The Fresno Bee

INSIDE
Fresno-area home prices witness the 19th-largest increase in the nation. Business, C1

Transporter 2
The new transporter, built by the state, is a major step in the state's effort to improve its transportation system.

Victory for gays
The state's Supreme Court has ruled in favor of gay couples, a major victory for the gay community.

Sunny and warm
The weather is expected to be sunny and warm for the rest of the week.

THE FRESNO BEE - FINAL - 1 - 09/02/05 (A-1) Printed 09/02/05 05:11 DAYNAMES
Largest Print in the Fresno Bee/News/Pages (A1-FRAT)

"Deseret News; Salt Lake City, Utah"

Fall movies offer thrills, chills, laughs and tears WEEKEND W3

Utah's 8.5% rise in home prices ranks 31st in U.S. BUSINESS D12

Time for a new litty Bitty Salt Lake City contest LIT C1

DESERET Morning News
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2005
\$4.00 (40¢ per copy)

Video links London bombings to al-Qaida
Al Jazeera tape shows terrorists praising blasts

Rising rage Descent into anarchy



Chaos spreads as law breaks down
By John R. Brown
New Orleans

Utahns rally to aid victims of hurricane
By John R. Brown
New Orleans

Utahns race to pumps as prices soar
By John R. Brown
New Orleans

New public-housing complex may allow convicted killers
By John R. Brown
New Orleans

INSIDE
Fall movies offer thrills, chills, laughs and tears WEEKEND W3

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WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 3, 2005
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■ Critical Thinking Versus Random Thinking

Take a few moments just to let some thoughts pass through your mind. What are you thinking about? Are you reflecting on what you did last night or what you intend to do this weekend? Are you worried about an assignment that is due or a test that is coming up? Maybe you are focusing on an important person in your life. Perhaps you are just thinking about how hungry or tired you are. The possibilities are endless.

What you just did was an example of **random thinking**, which is *thinking without a clear purpose or objective in mind*. We all do this kind of thinking countless times each day, often without even realizing it. Sometimes we are simply daydreaming, thinking about past experiences, or wondering or worrying about some future activity. Thoughts pop into mind and just as quickly out; they come and go without much effort on our part. Nothing is really accomplished as a result, except perhaps a rest or escape from whatever we may be doing at that particular time.

Random thinking is not critical thinking. How do they differ? Let's look at an example.

Suppose that you and a friend are considering whether to take a particular course next semester. The two of you approach another student who enrolled for that course last year, and she informs you that she dropped it after two weeks because it was so boring. On the basis of that conversation, your friend decides not to take the course. Although you are tempted to do the same thing, you decide instead to give the matter more thought because you do not think it wise to base your decision solely on the opinion of one student, who might have had a personal reason for not appreciating the course. For example, she could have had a problem at the time that interfered with her ability to fulfill the course requirements, or she could have been uncomfortable with the instructor's personality and teaching style. These may have been good reasons at the time for her not to stay in the course, but that does not mean that they should have an effect on your decision. Consequently, rather than automatically accepting one person's opinion, you decide to spend more time and effort getting additional information before coming to a final decision.

You organize your efforts by first getting a class schedule for next semester in order to find out the days and times that the course is offered and which faculty teach it. You want to determine if you can fit the course into your schedule and whether you have a choice of instructor. Second, you check the college catalog so that you can read the course description to see what it is about in a general sense and whether it can

be used as part of your program of study. Third, you obtain a copy of a recent course syllabus from the department, a counselor, the instructor, or a student so that you can get additional information on assignments and grading. Fourth, you ask around so that you can find and talk to more students who have taken the course. Fifth, you discuss the course with a faculty member and your counselor or academic adviser.

After considering carefully all the information you gathered, you now feel confident about coming to a conclusion regarding whether to enroll in the course. You know that it fits into your program of study and your schedule, and you have a better understanding of its content. Furthermore, you are aware of who teaches the course and can determine whether you are comfortable with his or her teaching style, grading policies, and personality. No matter what you ultimately decide to do, you have placed yourself in a much stronger position to make the right decision *for you*. However, you do continue to reconsider that decision right up until the time of registration, just in case you find out some additional information that changes your mind.

The process that you used in the example above involved **critical thinking**, which is best described as *a very careful and thoughtful way of dealing with events, issues, problems, decisions, or situations*. As you can see, critical thinking can be very helpful to you. Let's take a brief look at its many benefits and uses.

■ Benefits and Uses of Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is important because it makes you a much more careful decision maker who has the best chance of assessing situations accurately, making sense of issues and events, and coming up with solutions to problems. Because critical thinkers do not accept blindly everything they see, hear, or read, they place themselves in better positions to understand what is going on around them, to avoid costly mistakes, and to accomplish whatever they set out to do.

There are no limits to the uses of critical thinking. It can help you evaluate textbook material and other types of reading; uncover motivations and assess arguments; consider options, products, advertisements, and commercials; and judge policies and programs such as those offered by the various levels of government. The benefits of critical thinking for you are very real and substantial no matter what roles you play in life now and in the future, including those of student, professional, parent, and citizen. Make it a habit to think critically about everything!

■ Characteristics of Critical Thinking

How do you know for sure when you are thinking critically? The answer to that question involves a discussion of its characteristics. Critical thinking requires:

- flexibility
- a clear purpose
- organization
- time and effort
- asking questions and finding answers
- research
- coming to logical conclusions

Let's consider each of these characteristics in more detail.

Flexibility

Critical thinking is **flexible thinking** because it involves a willingness to consider various possibilities before coming to a conclusion. Critical thinkers do not jump to conclusions or automatically accept what they first see, hear, or read. They are willing to gather and consider additional information, even if it does not support what they initially think or want to do. In the course selection example, it would have been easy for you simply to accept the first student's opinion and your friend's decision regarding the course. Even though you may have been tempted to take the quick and easy way out, you delayed your decision until you had a chance to gather more information. Realizing that your first reaction to the course was negative, you still managed to keep an open mind and were willing to consider carefully other viewpoints.

Critical thinkers, then, are aware of their initial feelings about decisions, issues, problems, or situations yet willing to look at other possibilities before taking action. *They are also willing to allow others the opportunity to voice their opinions, and they give careful consideration to those opinions before coming to their own conclusions.* In the end, critical thinkers may stick with their initial feelings, but only after much investigation and thought.

ACTIVITY 1

DIRECTIONS: Think about an example from your life in which you showed flexibility and an example from your life in which you did not. Be prepared to discuss your two examples.

ACTIVITY 2

DIRECTIONS: Read and think carefully about the following passage. Decide which side of the argument you disagree with and why. Show flexibility by writing a paragraph in support of that position. In other words, you are being asked to ignore your personal viewpoint and support the opposite one. You may consult the Web sites listed to get more ideas. You will be asked to provide the reasons why you disagree with the argument and also discuss the paragraph you wrote in support of it.

Should the Voting Age Be Lowered to Sixteen?

1 In California, some legislators have proposed giving partial voting rights to teens. Fourteen-year-olds would receive a one-quarter vote and sixteen-year-olds would receive a half vote. Internationally, Germany and Austria have already lowered their voting ages to sixteen. Students and elected officials in Tanzania have made demands to lower the voting age from eighteen. This is because Tanzanians finish their education at fourteen and because of falling life expectancy rates due to the African AIDS epidemic.

2 Throughout its history, the United States has expanded voting rights. It started with removing restrictions based on property ownership. Later, the Fifteenth and Nineteenth Amendments granted suffrage respectively to African American men and all women. Passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment lowered the voting age to eighteen. Should we continue to expand voting rights by lowering the voting age still further?

Pro

3 The government must represent the interests of all Americans, but we cannot guarantee that it will if we do not lower the age limit. There are issues that uniquely affect young voters. The government can overlook these unless teens hold it accountable by voting.

4 There is no magical transformation one undergoes when one turns eighteen. By sixteen, a person has more or less developed intellectually. Some sixteen-year-olds have more maturity than some adults.

5 The earlier young people are exposed to politics, the more likely they will participate when they're older. We should socialize American youth to become better citizens by introducing them to democracy through the election process. We may get a better voter turnout in the long run.

Con

6 In most states, the age when one acquires the legal rights and responsibilities of an adult is currently eighteen years. In a legal sense, young people are not recognized as independent members of society until they turn eighteen, after which they automatically have the right to vote.

Critical Thinking and Contemporary Issues

- 7 High school students often do not complete their civics and American government education until their junior and senior years in high school. Individuals should have a proper foundation in the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship before they vote.
- 8 Lowering the voting age will not make any difference in the outcomes of elections. Most sixteen-year-olds are not interested in politics and likely would not vote. It might be worse if they did, since they would not have a very good idea of what they were doing.
- 9 Selected Web Sites:
<http://www.youthrights.org/votingage.php>
http://votesforadults.typepad.com/votes_for_adults/2004/04/

"Should the Voting Age Be Lowered to Sixteen?" from Karen O'Connor and Larry J. Sabato, *American Government: Continuity and Change*, 2006, pp. 492–493

Clear Purpose

Critical thinking is deliberate thinking because it always involves a **clear purpose**, a specific goal. When you think critically, you are looking for reasons or explanations for events, considering various sides of an issue, attempting to solve a problem, coming to a decision, or making sense of a situation. For example, you may be trying to figure out how an event such as an automobile accident occurred, distinguish among the arguments on both sides of an issue such as abortion, come up with a solution to a problem such as a low grade in a course, decide where to go on vacation, or understand the reasons behind a political event such as a war or revolution. In the course example, the decision whether to register for the course was the purpose you, as a critical thinker, had in mind.

ACTIVITY 3

DIRECTIONS: Think about an experience from your past in which you demonstrated critical thinking by having a clear purpose—in other words, an example of an instance when you tried to reach a specific goal. The experience could involve you looking for reasons or explanations for events, considering various sides of an issue, attempting to solve a problem, coming to a decision, or making sense of a situation. Be prepared to discuss your example in class.

ACTIVITY 4

DIRECTIONS: Read the following article; then discuss it with a classmate. Together, try to come up with possible reasons or explanations for the actions of Joseph Chavis. Your purpose here is to try to make sense of the situation.