



## Resilience Building Resource Hub *A Shilp Initiative*

TOOLKITS | PROGRAM RESOURCES | ARTICLES | ONLINE LEARNING |  
GUIDES | VIDEOS | FRAMEWORKS



## WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Do you want to help you and your team diagnose problems and identify solutions that are out of the box? Do you want to create an environment that supports critical and objective analysis?

If yes, then this is the right place for you. In this self-paced module we will take you through the fundamentals of critical thinking and ways in which you can develop this skill.

*“The essence of the independent mind lies not in what it thinks, but in how it thinks.”  
— Christopher Hitchens*

Mastering our ability to think critically and solve problems is an essential competency in today’s workplace and allows us to make better decisions and recommendations in support of our organization. No matter where you’re at in your career, you need critical thinking skills to complete everyday tasks effectively.

This section will help you understand:

- the importance of critical thinking
- ways to develop critical thinking in the workplace
- additional resources to help you get to an expert level
- self-reflection and action planning
- some DIY tips to get you started on this journey

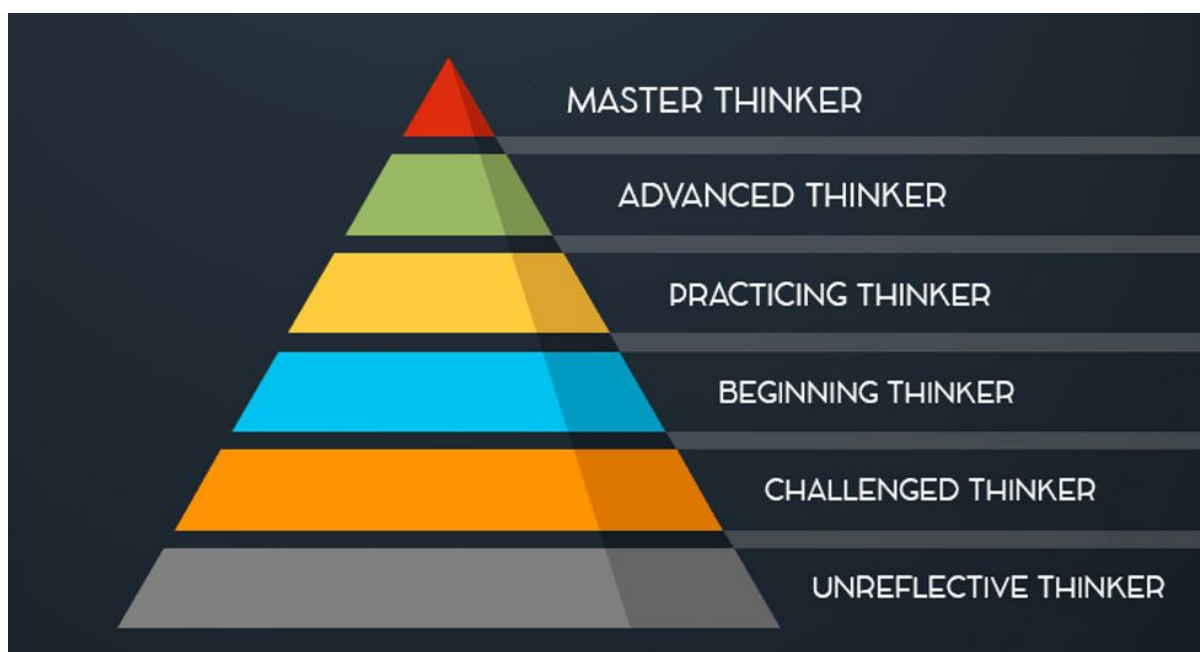
So, let’s get started!

## What is critical thinking?

Critical thinking is the ability to make informed decisions by evaluating several different sources of information objectively or in simpler words it's thinking about how you think. Using this approach, you are always questioning whether the ideas, arguments and findings you come across are the whole picture and you are open to finding that they are not. You are identifying, analysing and, where possible, solving problems systematically. Now more than ever, organisations will be looking for employees who show strong critical thinking ability. Being able to analyse information, draw conclusions and activate plans – without supervision will be key to performance and innovation.

Psychologists Linda Elder and Richard Paul (2010) have developed a theory to explain the stages of development in critical thinking. It suggests that people aren't born critical thinkers, but rather progress through several more-or-less universal stages of critical thinking development.

Here are the stages that one goes through as they develop their critical thinking skills:



Source: Big Think

**Stage One:** The Unreflective Thinker (we are unaware of significant problems in our thinking)

**Stage Two:** The Challenged Thinker (we become aware of problems in our thinking)

**Stage Three:** The Beginning Thinker (we try to improve but without regular practice)

**Stage Four:** The Practicing Thinker (we recognize the necessity of regular practice)

**Stage Five:** The Advanced Thinker (we advance in accordance with our practice)

**Stage Six:** The Master Thinker (skilled & insightful thinking become second nature to us)

### **Stage One: The Unreflective Thinker**

In stage one, we are fundamentally unaware of the role that thinking is playing in our lives and don't consistently practice any critical thinking methods.

At this stage, poor thinking causes many problems in our lives even though we might be unaware of this. Our egocentric tendencies play a dominant role in our thinking. We lack the skills to notice how self-centred and prejudiced we are, how often we stereotype others and how frequently we irrationally dismiss ideas because we don't want to change our behaviour or our way of looking at things.

### **Stage Two: The Challenged Thinker**

In this next level, the thinker has awareness of the importance of thinking and knows that deficiencies in thinking can bring about major issues. As the psychologists explain, to solve a problem, you must first admit you have one.

People at this intellectual stage begin to understand that "high quality thinking requires deliberate reflective thinking about thinking", and can acknowledge that their own mental processes might have many flaws. They might not be able to identify all the flaws, however.

### **Stage Three: The Beginning Thinker**

Thinkers at this level have committed to making critical thinking a part of their life, and have begun to self-monitor and observe their own thinking practices and habits. They know that their own thinking can have blind spots and other problems and take steps to address those, but in a limited capacity.

Beginning thinkers place more value in reason, becoming self-aware in their thoughts. They may also be able to start looking at the concepts and biases underlying their ideas. Additionally, such thinkers develop higher internal standards of clarity, accuracy and logic, realizing that their ego plays a key role in their decisions.

Another big aspect that differentiates this thinker is the ability to take criticism of their mental approach, even though they still have work to do and might lack clear solutions to the issues they identify.

### **Stage Four: The Practicing Thinker**

The practicing thinker understands what types of changes they must make to their "old" patterns of thinking and are committed to actively practicing critical thinking.

While they might be able to express their mind's strengths and weaknesses, practicing thinkers might still not have a systematic way of gaining insight into their thoughts and can fall prey to egocentric and self-deceptive reasoning.

How do you get to this stage? An important trait to gain, say the psychologists, is "intellectual perseverance." This quality can provide "the impetus for developing a realistic plan for systematic practice (with a view to taking greater command of one's thinking)."

### **Stage Five: The Advanced Thinker**

This higher-level thinker has established excellent critical thinking habits and are beginning to reap the benefits of applying these habits throughout their lives. They would be fair-minded and able to spot the prejudicial aspects in the points of view of others and their own understanding.

While they'd have a good handle on the role of their ego in the idea flow, such thinkers might still not be able to grasp all the influences that affect their mentality.

The advanced thinker is at ease with self-critique and is looking to make improvements. Among key traits required for this level are "intellectual insight" to develop new thought habits, "intellectual integrity" to "recognize areas of inconsistency and contradiction in one's life," intellectual empathy" to put oneself in the place of others in order to genuinely understand them, and the "intellectual courage" to confront ideas and beliefs they don't necessarily believe in and have negative emotions towards.

### Stage Six: The Master Thinker

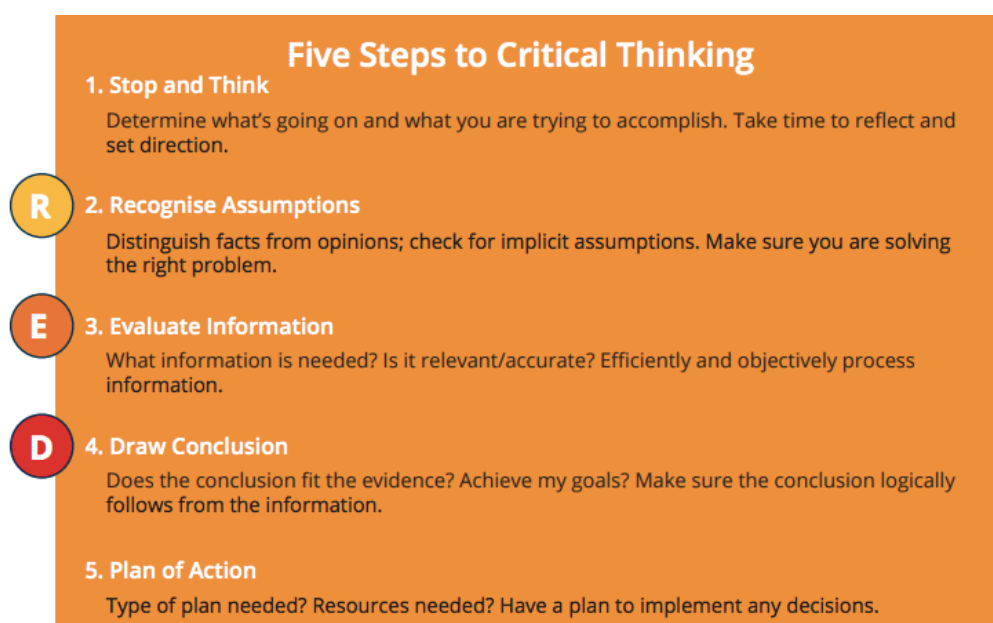
This is the super-thinker, the one who is totally in control of how they process information and make decisions. Such people constantly seek to improve their thought skills, and through experience "regularly raise their thinking to the level of conscious realization."

A master thinker achieves great insights into deep mental levels, strongly committed to being fair and gaining control over their own egocentrism. Such a high-level thinker also exhibits superior practical knowledge and insight, always re-examining their assumptions for weaknesses, logic, and biases. Last and most importantly a master thinker wouldn't get upset with being intellectually confronted and spends a considerable amount of time analysing their own responses.

We could all benefit from sharpening our critical thinking skills. Furthermore, as leaders, managers, or team members, we want to see critical thinking skills utilized fully by our employees, colleagues, and teammates. So how can we encourage the development of this skill, moving from "unreflective thinkers" to "master thinkers"?

### How to develop critical thinking skills?

When faced with finding a logical solution to a problem, Pearson's five step model to improving critical thinking is a simple model that can be applied to help individuals to reframe their assumptions, identify any unconscious bias and to think differently.



Source: Pearson

## **Additional Resources:**

### **The Seven Key Steps Of Critical Thinking**

Read this article by Forbes to understand key steps in developing critical thinking skills along with the characteristics and components of critical thinking

Duration: 15 mins

Article

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2018/04/20/the-seven-key-steps-of-critical-thinking/?sh=65ddd2a6a528>

### **Thinking Critically**

Learn the process of examining, analyzing, questioning, and challenging situations, issues, and information of all kinds in this resource by Community Toolbox

Duration: 20 mins

Article

<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/analyze/analyze-community-problems-and-solutions/think-critically/main>

### **Logical and Critical Thinking**

Improve your logical and critical thinking skills in this free online course. Identify common obstacles to effective thinking.

Duration: 32 hours

Course

<https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/logical-and-critical-thinking>

### **A Systematic Process for Critical Thinking**

This toolkit provides a systematic process for critical thinking that you and your team can follow for strategic planning or solving complex problems

Duration: 25 mins

Toolkit

[http://training.hr.ufl.edu/resources/LeadershipToolkit/job\\_aids/SystematicProcessforCriticalThinking.pdf](http://training.hr.ufl.edu/resources/LeadershipToolkit/job_aids/SystematicProcessforCriticalThinking.pdf)

### **How Leaders Should Think Critically**

Critical thinking has always been a prized attribute of leadership. Read this article to learn about three things you need to do to think critically

Duration: 15 mins

Article

<https://hbr.org/2010/01/how-leaders-should-think-criti>

### **Thinking, Fast and Slow**

Why is there more chance we'll believe something if it's in a bold type face? Why are judges more likely to deny parole before lunch? Why do we assume a good-looking person will be more competent? The answer lies in the two ways we make choices: fast, intuitive thinking, and slow, rational thinking. This book reveals how our minds are tripped up by error and prejudice (even when we think we are being logical), and gives you practical techniques for slower, smarter thinking. It will enable to you make better decisions at work, at home, and in everything you do.

Duration: 4 - 5 hours

Book

[https://www.amazon.in/Thinking-Fast-Penguin-Press-Non-Fiction/dp/0141033576/ref=tmm\\_pap\\_swatch\\_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=](https://www.amazon.in/Thinking-Fast-Penguin-Press-Non-Fiction/dp/0141033576/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_0?encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=)

### **7 Mental Exercises to Make You a Better Critical Thinker**

Whether you're trying to brainstorm a new idea, creatively solve an existing problem, or just analyze how and why something went wrong, critical thinking can lead you to better resolutions. Use these exercises to enhance your critical thinking skills

Duration: 15 mins

Article

<https://www.inc.com/larry-alton/7-mental-exercises-to-make-you-a-better-critical-thinker.html>

## **Self-reflection and action planning:**

### Mandate a Question Checklist

Next time when you are solving a problem, think about a list of questions that you can use as a checklist or guide. The nature of the questions will vary depending on the type of work, but could include some of the following examples:

- What are the possible outcomes of this situation?
- What is the best outcome? The worst?
- How does this situation affect the target audience or project?
- Who else needs to be aware of this situation?
- What assumptions am I making about the situation?

You can also share this checklist with your colleagues or team members and the questions should provoke them to view the situation from a different perspective. Ideally, you or your team members will eventually learn to start asking themselves the necessary questions without the checklist.

### **DIY Tools:**

1. Practice planning and organizing daily in solitude.
2. Imagine and envision what can work better, not just what has worked before.
3. Document problem-solving processes that work. Then share them across your teams.
4. Enhance your wellness: It's easier to think critically when you take care of your mental and physical health.
5. Look beyond what you're reading/hearing. Look for other viewpoints, interpretations and perspectives.

6. Journal every day: Albert Einstein, Steve Jobs, Ben Franklin and Arianna Huffington have all discussed their habit of journal-keeping and how it was one of the reasons for their success. It allows you write down what you're thinking and then review it with a critical eye, modifying it to adjust your perspective. This technique, coined by a former Disney executive, is called displayed thinking. If ideas are rumbling around in your head, they aren't as clear. When you see them in writing, their clarity is enhanced.
7. Can you listen to arguments you don't agree with? Most importantly, are you prepared to change your mind? Cultivate open-mindedness to get perspectives from people with a different background, skill set or experiences.
8. Question assumptions: Part of being a critical thinker is to question assumptions. After all, sometimes, conventional wisdom can be wrong. When Uber first launched, everyone said the government would never allow it to remain in business because their fleet were effectively unlicensed taxis. Yet now they're a fixture in cities across the world. Always ask critical questions like: What assumptions are we making? Are these assumptions still valid? Have the rules changed? In short, increase your success by thinking about how you think.
9. If you're in a leadership role, teach your team members how to think more critically and objectively. Having a team of critical thinkers will make them more effective and efficient. Teaching others a skill will also make you stronger at that skill yourself. As John Quincy Adams once said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."
10. Have team brainstorming sessions - Another way to improve your team's critical-thinking skills is to practice brainstorming. Brainstorming promotes creative thinking which can help your team approach challenges from a different angle. Once a week or once a month, have a meeting with your team to hammer out problems as a team. Each team member can bring a challenge they're currently dealing with, or you can bring a relevant case study for your team to discuss.
11. If an employee comes to you with a problem, instead of just giving them the answer, ask them, "What do you think the best solution is?" Listen to their response, and ask follow up questions to make sure they are thinking through the outcome of their suggestion. If you do end up needing to give them the solution, take the time to explain how you came to your conclusion and why your action plan will produce the best outcome. That will give your reports insight into your thought process and help them emulate it the next time they're faced with a similar challenge.