Critical Thinking:
Forming an Informed Opinion

Dr Suzanne Guerin
What is critical thinking?

• “Critical thinking is one important way of engaging with the subject matter of your course. It involves considering different points of view and alternative interpretations and then entering into a critical dialogue or debate with the material you are studying”. Skills4Study
The realities of study!
Questions and answers

- We are constantly surrounded by information
- Where do you find information or answers to questions?
Methods for answering questions*

- **Intuition**
  - What do I think?

- **Authority**
  - What does someone who knows think?

- **Rationalism**
  - What does logic or reason suggest?

- **Empiricism**
  - What do the available data suggest?

*Hughes (1999)
All methods have strengths and limitations ...

- Intuition
- Authority
- Rationalism
- Empiricism

Can you identify possible issues in these methods?
Somebody told me ...

- Sometimes considered as anecdotal evidence
- But who is the source?
- Self fulfilling?
- I know someone who ...

http://www.smbc-comics.com/
Answers in the media

First child can break rather than make marriage - study

CAROL COULTER Legal Affairs Editor

HAVING A child can break rather than make a marriage, new research has found.
Answers in social media
Answer from Research

Research is an important source of evidence

BUT ...

Important to be confident evaluating the quality of evidence, and the quality of research
Need a method of judging the information you gather!
The role of critical thinking

• “Skills in critical thinking bring precision to the way you think and work” (Cottrell, 2005, p.4)
• Provides you with a basis to evaluate the different types of information
• Helps turn an opinion into an informed opinion
Taking a Critical View Means…

- not taking things you read (or hear) at face value
- never taking an assumption for granted
- asking questions (of people and of texts)
- being thoughtful
- finding information
- understanding different approaches and arguments
- understanding the evidence used to support an argument
- using questions, arguments and evidence in your writing

(Williams, 2009 p. viii)
Elements of critical thinking

• Identifying other people’s positions
• Evaluating the evidence for other views
• Weighing up different positions fairly
• Being able to read between the lines
• Reflecting on issues in a structured way
• Drawing conclusions based on good evidence
• Presenting your opinion clearly and in a reasoned way

Cottrell, 2005, p.2
Some Questions to Ask

- What is the main opinion, message or claim being presented in the information?
- What or who is the source of this claim?
- What type of evidence is being used to support the opinion or argument?
  - With research evidence – what type of research is it?
- How valid or reliable (trustworthy) is the evidence?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the evidence being used?
  - Are there potential sources of bias?
- Are there possible alternative explanations?
- What is the most likely conclusion based on the evidence?

After Egan et al
Welcome to skills4studycampus

Skills4studycampus is an interactive e-learning resource, focusing on the core study skills you'll need for success on your course, which have been adapted from The Study Skills Handbook by Stella Cottrell. It offers you a stimulating mix of activities, practice and reflection to help you learn, develop and accelerate your study skills!

To find out more about skills4studycampus (including instructions on how to use the resource), click ‘Help and FAQs’ in the top right-hand corner of this page. Or, to get stuck in, select a module from the menu on the left-hand side of the screen.

skills4studycampus at my university or college
Resources
Rules to live by ...

• Take the time to weigh up information
• Look for other possible views
• Be aware of the quality of the source