

Thinking Critically About Information Tutorial

We are often told to think critically about information. But what does that actually mean? Thinking critically about information means asking questions and being intentional about what information we accept or reject. It helps us make sense of the mass amounts of information we encounter every day.

It may feel overwhelming when you start to question information, because the humans and institutions that create that information are imperfect and sometimes get it wrong. It may feel tempting at times to just be cynical and not trust ANY information, but don't let that happen!

Here are some strategies to get started thinking critically about information and help you to avoid feeling overwhelmed:

- Ask questions about where the information came from: who published it, when was it published, where did the writer get their information, what are the goals of the author or publisher, what kind of process did it have to go through in order to be published, Is it appropriate for what you need right now?
- Cross check your sources and weigh evidence by looking at this information more broadly. Is it confirmed elsewhere?
- You won't be able to find an answer to every question for all kinds of information, but that doesn't automatically mean it isn't worth considering. Part of the process is being okay with some unanswered questions.
- It's also important to be aware of your previously existing thoughts and feelings and how they may impact you. We tend to like information that tells us what we want to hear and confirms our existing beliefs more easily than information that may challenge those preconceived notions and wishes.
- For example, if we really love coffee, we may not question studies that say coffee is good for you. Or, if you happen to be a mouse, you may really want to believe that cheese can somehow make you smarter, but be careful! **Make sure you're evaluating information you like just as critically as information you don't.**
- Make sure you only share information that you've read entirely and evaluated yourself.

Whether it's information to plan a party, information for a research paper, or information you're reading to learn on your own, you want to make sure to take the time to evaluate what you're reading.

Remember to be critical - not cynical. Ask questions, but try not to get so frustrated that you dismiss everything. Humans are imperfect, and it can be frustrating to hear about those who are intentionally deceiving one another. However, it is important to remember that there are plenty of institutions, organizations, scholars, and other people that are working to make good information available to all.

And, as always, if you need help finding or evaluating information, chat with a librarian to get some help.