

Introduction

Below we have summarized Daniel's 7 pieces of advice for being a better critical thinker. If you want more, be sure to check out his full article on Psychology Today. In the meantime, think also about how to extend these practices to your learners for fostering bulletproof critical thinking.

Source: <https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/7-things-better-critical-thinker>

1. Don't believe it just because others do

It's easy to fall into this trap if you don't consider that the majority doesn't necessarily rule intelligently. However, a better critical thinker makes up their own mind after viewing opinions and collecting facts. This is more important than ever in the age of fake news and unregulated Web content.

"Yes, there is such a thing as the wisdom of the crowds," says Daniel, "but it has limited applicability, especially when the crowds aren't thinking critically."

2. Don't believe it because fancy website ..

Don't believe it because it has a fancy website, scientific terms, or equations

The Internet is the one place where it's easy to fall into digital rabbit holes. This happens when we're enticed by a sparkling presentation of information we can't ignore. As such, we must learn to cast a more discerning eye on what we consume online

. "Too many of us are bamboozled by fancy terms, bold headlines, and testimonials," cautions Daniel. "Take a moment to look more carefully at the evidence being presented."

3. Don't reject source occasionally wrong

Everybody makes mistakes, even entities whose primary job is to report the facts. We shouldn't take the occasional item of misinformation as a sign of unreliability. Instead, look at the bigger picture.

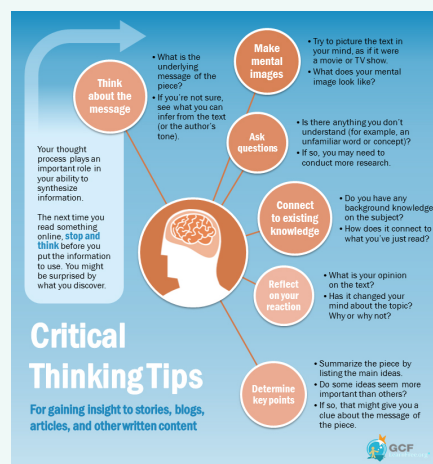
This was true a long time ago: "The New York Times is one of the most reliable and rigorously fact-checked news sources in the world. They do make mistakes and they print corrections every day. But on the whole, if you read something there, it has a very high likelihood of being true."

4. Check for plausibility

If bold and outrageous claims sound too good to be true, they probably are. It's here that fact-checking comes into play, an essential part of Information Fluency.

Example: "One widely reported statistic was that 150,000 girls in the U.S. die each year of anorexia. That can't be true: The total number of deaths for girls from all causes in a single year is only about 8,500 ... you'd find that out by checking reputable sources, such as the CDC."

Critical Thinking



5. Correlation is not causation

Seemingly related events that occur or transform together doesn't necessarily mean that one caused the other. "Ice-cream sales tend to increase during months when people are wearing short pants, but you wouldn't want to conclude that eating ice cream causes people to wear shorts, or that wearing shorts causes people to eat ice cream," Daniel says.

6. Check that the evidence supports the conclusion

Does the evidence of the claim actually lend weight to the overall conclusion? If not, it's probably just big talk or extraneous padding of information. In such cases, find a way to discern pertinence from packaging.

"Fast-talking, loose purveyors of information may flummox you with a whole bunch of data that aren't related to the claim," Daniel warns. "Sometimes they do this intentionally; sometimes they don't know that they're doing it."



7. Look for a “control condition”

A control condition refers to the group in an experiment that is opposite the treatment group. This is the group that doesn't receive the application of whatever is being tested. In this way, the experiment has a baseline to use in determining if there is any change:

Example: “A new pill claims to cure headaches within four hours ... evidence reveals that people with headaches were given the pill and reported that their headaches got better. What we don't know is how many headaches would have gotten better on their own ... to know that, you'd need an experiment in which a control group of people, randomly selected, get no treatment and are compared with the treatment group.”

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