



Critical Thinking

What it is: “Critical Thinking” is a commonly-used term with varying and sometimes vague definitions. For the purposes of **ACCESS Afterschool** programming, we will align with The Partnership for 21st Century Skills’ description, as “...the capacity of active investigative thinking¹,” elements of which include analysis, problem solving, reasoning and decision making.

Why it should be taught: Data show that students who are explicitly taught critical thinking skills embedded across the curriculum may score higher in standardized tests,² find everyday problems easier to solve³ and be better prepared for career or college.⁴

Strategies to implement Critical Thinking in **ACCESS Afterschool**⁵:

- Have students break down big questions or tasks into manageable segments
- Assist students in clarifying their thoughts by rephrasing or asking thought-provoking questions
- Encourage students to explain things in their own words to each other
- Help students to find answers by suggesting resources and how to use them
- Support decision-making skills by encouraging students to apply the Decision-Making Model⁶

Applications/Examples:

- Cooking class students create a budget and a menu to feed X people, search resources for recipes that meet health or other criteria
- Fitness class students could use the Decision-Making Model to select the best activity to meet fitness/health goals
- Jr. Police Academy students could use analyze “evidence” to solve a mock crime
- Carpentry students could break a building project into smaller construction steps
- Movie Making students use critical thinking to create a storyboard
- Lego Building students use critical thinking and analysis to solve construction issues
- Art students create posters identifying a problem & advertising a solution to display at school
- Journaling students use a prompt to make and defend their choice(s) and decisions⁷

¹ *The Intellectual and Policy Foundations of the 21st Century Skills Framework* (2007), p. 12.

http://route21.p21.org/images/stories/epapers/skills_foundations_final.pdf

² Crook, J. (2006), *NCA Final Documentation Report*. Retrieved from: http://www.criticalthinking.org/files/NCA_Final2.pdf

³ Dewar, G. *Teaching critical thinking: An evidence-based guide*, Retrieved from:

<http://www.parentingscience.com/teaching-critical-thinking.html>

⁴ American Management Association, *AMA 2012 Critical Skills Survey*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.amanet.org/uploaded/2012-Critical-Skills-Survey.pdf>

⁵ Critical Thinking Press (2010), *Critical Thinking Handbook 6 – 9 grades*, P. 21

⁶ [True Sport 100% Me Facilitator Guide](#), p. 6

Five Steps to the “Decision-Making Model”

- 1) Identify the problem/question/issue,
- 2) Identify available solutions/choices and analyze the pros & cons,
- 3) Consider possible consequences of each choice,
- 4) Make a reasoned decision and take action
- 5) Reflect on the decision made & evaluate the effectiveness of your decision.

⁷ Hopkins, G. (2005), [Rock or Feather? A Critical-Thinking Activity](http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson145.shtml), Education World. Retrieved from: http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson145.shtml