Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Differentiate between critical thinking, first-order thinking, second-order thinking, and skilled thinking.
2. Define concepts associated with critical thinking.
3. Discuss the term habit.
4. Identify goals of critical thinking.
5. Discuss the idea of "taking charge" of one's learning and one's life through improvement in thinking.
6. Recognize the traits of an undisciplined mind.
7. State, elaborate, and illustrate the various traits of mind essential for fair-minded critical thinking.
8. Define and differentiate between higher-order thinking, fallacies, and weak-sense critical thinking.
9. Identify traits conducive to fair-mindedness.

Unit Summary

Critical thinking is the art of clarifying your use of the reasoning process pertinent to any set of circumstances. Nothing is more practical than sound thinking. Poor thinking inevitably causes problems, wastes time and energy, and causes frustration and angst. Critical Thinking, also referred to as Logic, is a discipline that comes with years of practice. Nothing you can do will guarantee that you will find the complete truth about anything, but you can get better at it. Excellence of thought and skill in thinking and problem solving are real possibilities.

To maximize the quality of your thinking you must learn to become an effective critic of your thinking. To do this you must make learning about thinking a priority. Serious study of reasoning and serious thinking about the process is rare in human life and not a subject of many schools. Nor is it taught at home. But if you focus your attention for a moment on the role that thinking is playing in your life, you may come to recognize that everything you do, want, or feel is influenced by your thinking. Learning how to maximize your thinking can open up new doors, help you see new options, minimize significant mistakes, maximize potential understandings, and enhance your reasoning regarding your choices in life.

Becoming a skilled critical thinker requires hard work; it will not happen overnight. You must be willing to practice certain methods of thinking and problem solving that will at times seem laborious. However, the benefits exhibit themselves when you are more effective at problem solving, substantiating your conclusions and ideas, and when you realize you have improved your ability to be objective.
Objectivity is essential when analyzing your strengths and weaknesses within your patterns of reasoning. Important concepts like love, justice, peace and integrity are often difficult to define. It is important to gain knowledge about these and other concepts by developing structures that apply to our thinking.

The most important skills you will acquire include improved communication, developing an open mind that allows you to make unbiased decisions, learning appropriate methods of raising questions, and identifying errors in your own reasoning and in the reasoning of others.