Learning Objectives

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

1. State and elaborate on the elements of thought as a basic tool of critical thinking.
2. Apply the elements of thought to a concrete example.
3. Define reasoning purposes, questions, points of view, information, inferences, concepts, implications, assumptions, "thinking to some purpose", inert information, activated ignorance, activated knowledge.
4. Distinguish between inferences and assumptions.
5. Identify possible inferences based on information, and to identify underlying assumptions of those inferences.
6. Express ideas in several different ways until nonlinear relationships become intuitive.
7. Distinguish between inert information, activated ignorance, and activated knowledge.
8. Recognize and apply the criteria for standards - clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logicalness, and significance.
9. Recognize the negative consequences for failing to assess one's reasoning.
10. Differentiate between the use of each of the eight standards by skilled and unskilled thinkers.

Unit Summary

Chapter 4 begins with a focus on the elements of reasoning, the key to the analysis of thinking, because if we cannot accurately analyze the parts of someone's thinking, we are in a poor position to assess it. Analysis of the elements of thought is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition of evaluation. The elements of reasoning may be viewed as a whole (as collectively present in all thinking) as well as individually (as dimensions of thinking to focus on).

One of the most important skills in critical thinking is that of evaluating information. This skill begins with the important recognition that information and fact, information and verification, are not the same thing. It requires also the important recognition that everything presented as fact or as true is not.

To evaluate requires knowledge of the intellectual standards that highlight the qualities signaling strengths and weaknesses in thinking. Critical thinkers routinely ask questions that apply intellectual standards to thinking. The ultimate goal is for these questions to become so spontaneous that they form a natural part of our inner voice, guiding us to better and better reasoning. Unit III ends with a focus on the standards and questions that apply across the various facets of life.
Chapter 5 is designed to help students understand important standards for the assessment of thought and insight into the intellectual work required to use them effectively. While the standards covered in the chapter are not the only intellectual standards a person might use, they are among the most fundamental.