

So I understand the term critical thinking but I'm not entirely sure – how can I improve upon my own critical thinking? Well to be a good critical thinker you need to identify facts, you need to understand your point of view and the assumptions we make based upon your point of view. So let's start off by talking about identifying facts. You need to understand the difference between facts and opinion. A fact is something that you can prove. Yeah, that's something that I often find myself running into whether I'm reading a you know a research article, or maybe a book or something I'm not entirely sure if the facts in it have necessarily been proven or maybe they're out of date or something like that.

Let's start off with an easy example something like if I were to ask you – Who is the first President of the United States and you didn't know the answer; you could look it up in a book or on the internet to try to find the answer. The thing is if you look on the internet you need to make sure that you look at multiple websites and make sure you get a consistent answer on those sites. If opinions are confused with facts, all reasoning based upon them may be inaccurate.

I understand thinking about facts in a critical thinking manner but I'm a little confused when it comes to you know, my own opinions and my point of view. How do I go about that – thinking in a critical thinking manner? If I were to ask you what is your point of view on the subject of abortion? I'm not looking for you to give me a positive view of abortion or a negative view of abortion. I'm looking for what – from your point of view – led you to make that answer. So for example, someone might say as a Christian man, I am not in favor of abortion, or as a liberal woman I am in favor of abortion. Christian man and liberal woman are the points of view in those examples. So point of view is not the stand that you are taking on a particular subject. It is the how and the why behind what led you to take that particular stance.

Every person has a unique point of view that is determined by their race, sexual orientation, gender, social class, and life story. I feel like a lot of the time people may just – you know – based off of say like with age like Millennials my age; typically, we're thought to have a certain way of thinking about things when it might be different because of our different backgrounds or a bunch of other factors that all come into play.

Absolutely, well something important to remember – your point of view is limited by these characteristics and so too is your view of the world. By recognizing these limitations in our thinking we cannot claim to know more than we know, and we can be more open-minded.

Wouldn't assumptions and point of view be basically the same thing? How do those differ? Your assumptions are driven by your point of view. So let me give you an example: let's say you have an honor student in a class and she is receiving scholarship and she really enjoys school. Now she sees someone sleeping in class and she can't imagine ever sleeping during class because she realizes she is there on scholarship. So she assumes this sleeping student is a goof-off and doesn't even care about school. That's one assumption. But now let's say we have another student in this class who sees the sleeping student. This other student works at night to pay for college instead of assuming that this sleeping student is a goof-off this hard-working student assumes that the sleeping student is sleeping because he also works nights to pay for college and he's a really hard worker for just being in class that day.

So you have two people - the honor student and the night shift worker who have very different assumptions about the sleeping student. Yeah, I mean I would I would kind of assume that - you know maybe he was just bored in the class or something like that. Well, and another example is myself. I am a teacher; that is part of my point of view. If I see a sleeping student I may assume that that student is a bad student. But my point of view can be wrong as well because let's say that student was up all night with a sick family member and they are such a dedicated student that they decided that they should still go to class even though they're exhausted. Assumptions can be wrong.

Developing good critical thinking skills requires that you identify facts, understand your point of view, and recognize your assumptions. Good critical thinkers are not know-it-alls. They want to learn new information and expand their minds. But critical thinking takes practice. It's not something you learn overnight. The more you use critical thinking skills the better you'll get at it and the more you use it in everyday life, the better you will be at it.