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978-0-521-84589-2 - Critical Thinking in Psychology

Edited by Robert J. Sternberg, Henry L. Roediger III and Diane F. Halpern

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Critical Thinking in Psychology

Good scientific research depends on critical thinking at least as much as on factual knowledge; psychology is no exception to this rule. And yet, despite the importance of critical thinking, psychology students are rarely taught how to think critically about the theories, methods, and concepts they must use. This book is an introductory text on critical thinking for upper-level undergraduates and graduate students. It shows students how to think critically about key topics such as experimental research, statistical inference, case studies, logical fallacies, and ethical judgments.

Robert J. Sternberg is Dean of Arts and Sciences at Tufts University. Prior to that, he was IBM Professor of Psychology and Education in the Department of Psychology, Professor of Management in the School of Management, and Director of the Center for the Psychology of Abilities, Competencies, and Expertise (PACE) at Yale. He continues to direct the PACE Center from Tufts. He is the author of more than 1,000 journal articles, book chapters, and books, and he has received more than \$18 million in government and other grants and contracts for his research. Sternberg served as president of the American Psychological Association in 2003.

Henry L. Roediger III is the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor and the Dean of Academic Planning in Arts and Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis. He received his bachelor of arts degree from Washington & Lee University and his doctorate from Yale University. His research has centered on human learning and memory, with a recent focus on the application of basic cognitive research to educational applications. In 2003, he was named to the Institute of Scientific Information's list of Highly Cited Scientists. Roediger served as president of the American Psychological Society (now the Association for Psychological Science) in 2003–2004.

Diane F. Halpern is Professor of Psychology and Director of the Berger Institute for Work, Family, and Children at Claremont McKenna College. Her most recent books include *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking* (4th ed.); *Sex Differences in Cognitive Abilities* (3rd ed.), a special two-volume edited issue of the *American Behavioral Scientist* titled *Changes at the Intersection of Work and Family* (edited with Heidi R. Riggio, 2006), and *From Work–Family Balance to Work–Family Intersection: Changing the Metaphor* (edited with Susan Murphy, 2005). Halpern was 2004 president of the American Psychological Association. In addition, she has served as president of the Western Psychological Association, the Society for the Teaching of Psychology, and the Division of General Psychology of the American Psychological Association.

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Edited by

ROBERT J. STERNBERG

Tufts University

HENRY L. ROEDIGER III

Washington University in St. Louis

DIANE F. HALPERN

Claremont McKenna College



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[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations and Tables</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Contributors</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
1. The Nature and Nurture of Critical Thinking <i>Diane F. Halpern</i>	1
2. Evaluating Experimental Research: Critical Issues <i>Henry L. Roediger III and David P. McCabe</i>	15
3. Critical Thinking in Quasi-Experimentation <i>William R. Shadish</i>	37
4. Evaluating Surveys and Questionnaires <i>Norbert Schwarz</i>	54
5. Critical Thinking in Designing and Analyzing Research <i>Robert J. Sternberg and Elena L. Grigorenko</i>	75
6. The Case Study Perspective on Psychological Research <i>Randi Martin and Rachel Hull</i>	90
7. Informal Logical Fallacies <i>Jane Risen and Thomas Gilovich</i>	110
8. Designing Studies to Avoid Confounds <i>Kathleen B. McDermott and Gregory E. Miller</i>	131
9. Evaluating Theories <i>Simon Dennis and Walter Kintsch</i>	143
10. Not All Experiments Are Created Equal: On Conducting and Reporting Persuasive Experiments <i>Christian H. Jordan and Mark P. Zanna</i>	160

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84589-2 - Critical Thinking in Psychology

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

vi	<i>Contents</i>
11. Making Claims in Papers and Talks <i>Barbara A. Spellman, Judy DeLoache, and Robert A. Bjork</i>	177
12. Critical Thinking in Clinical Inference <i>Thomas F. Oltmanns and E. David Klonsky</i>	196
13. Evaluating Parapsychological Claims <i>Ray Hyman</i>	216
14. Why Would Anyone Do or Believe Such a Thing? A Social Influence Analysis <i>Anthony R. Pratkanis</i>	232
15. The Belief Machine <i>David J. Schneider</i>	251
16. Critical Thinking and Ethics in Psychology <i>Celia B. Fisher, Adam L. Fried, and Jessica K. Masty</i>	271
17. Critical Thinking in Psychology: It Really Is Critical <i>Robert J. Sternberg</i>	289
<i>Author Index</i>	297
<i>Subject Index</i>	305

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84589-2 - Critical Thinking in Psychology

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

List of Illustrations and Tables

ILLUSTRATIONS

2.1.	Jenkins' tetrahedral model of memory experiments.	<i>page</i> 28
6.1a.	Model of word production (adapted from Roelofs, 1992).	97
6.1b.	Interactive model of word production (adapted from Dell & O'Seaghdha, 1992).	97
8.1.	Venn diagram representing a situation in which covariance analysis would be beneficial. In this example, covariance analysis would allow one to estimate the influence of childhood maltreatment on future mental illness (over and above the influence of parental mental illness).	139
9.1.	Hypothetical retention data and fits to two possible models: A, data; B, linear fit; and C, power fit.	147
9.2.	Fits to retention data: A, linear; B, power; and C, cubic (adapted from lecture slides prepared by Michael Lee).	152
9.3.	Generalizing to new data: A, linear; B, power; and C, cubic. (adapted from lecture slides prepared by Michael Lee).	152
9.4.	A schematic representation of the landscape of scientific research in relation to the search for fundamental understanding and applied significance (adapted from Stokes, 1997).	155

TABLES

1.1.	A Short Taxonomy of Critical Thinking Skills	<i>page</i> 8
2.1.	Recognition Results for the Roediger–McDermott Experiment	25
14.1.	Some Additional Influence Tactics Used to Promote Strange Beliefs and Behavior	244
16.1.	Fisher's Eight-Step Decision–Making Model for Ethics in Psychology	278
		vii

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List of Contributors

Robert A. Bjork

University of California –
Los Angeles

Judy DeLoache

University of Virginia

Simon Dennis

University of Adelaide

Celia B. Fisher

Fordham University

Adam L. Fried

Fordham University

Thomas Gilovich

Cornell University

Elena L. Grigorenko

Yale University

Diane F. Halpern

Claremont McKenna College

Ray Hyman

University of Oregon

Rachel Hull

Rice University

Christian H. Jordan

Wilfrid Laurier University

Walter Kintsch

University of Colorado

E. David Klonsky

Stony Brook University

Jessica K. Mastly

Fordham University

Randi Martin

Rice University

David P. McCabe

Washington University in St. Louis

Kathleen B. McDermott

Washington University in St. Louis

Gregory E. Miller

University of British Columbia

Thomas F. Oltmanns

Washington University in St. Louis

Anthony R. Pratkanis

University of California –
Santa Cruz

Jane Risén

Cornell University

Henry L. Roediger, III

Washington University in St. Louis

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x

List of Contributors

David J. Schneider

Rice University

Norbert Schwarz

University of Michigan

William R. Shadish

University of California – Merced

Barbara A. Spellman

University of Virginia

Robert J. Sternberg

Tufts University

Mark P. Zanna

University of Waterloo

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

One day, the president of the American Psychological Association (Bob Sternberg), the president-elect of the APA (Diane Halpern), and the president of the American Psychological Society (now the Association for Psychological Science) (Roddy Roediger) got together to discuss ways in which these two large national associations, both concerned with psychology, might collaborate in a joint venture. Partly we wanted to show the ability of our sometimes rival organizations to collaborate, but partly, the three of us, friends of long standing, wanted to work together on a project. Eventually, we found ourselves talking about a topic that was of great interest to all three of us, and that also was, we thought, important for the field – the nature and development of critical thinking in psychology.

Our concern was that, although psychology curricula were pretty consistently strong in teaching students the main facts, theories, and research done in psychology, these curricula were more variable in the extent to which they fostered critical thinking in the discipline. Part of the reason for this variability, we thought, was that although some texts mentioned or even had exercises in critical thinking, the development of critical thinking in psychology was always secondary to their main purpose. Usually, the purpose of the books was primarily to convey subject matter, and only secondarily, at best, to promote critical thinking about this subject matter.

Of course, there are also books that teach for critical thinking, including books that we have written. But these books are domain general, focusing on critical thinking in general rather than critical thinking in psychology in particular. And if there is anything research in psychology has shown, it is that people often have difficulty applying domain-general principles, especially when they are learned in a decontextualized way, to thinking within a particular domain.

So we decided that what the field needed was a textbook prepared for undergraduates and beginning graduate students that would focus on the

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

nature and development of critical thinking skills and attitudes in psychology. We realized that we would need to edit rather than write such a book. Psychology is a multifaceted and broad discipline, and it would be hard for any one person to have all the knowledge needed for a written book. We decided to ask the people we considered the leading experts in different areas of psychology, including the psychology of critical thinking, to write about the different aspects of critical thinking in psychology. This book is the result.

We are grateful to our sponsoring organizations, the APA and the APS, for their sponsorship of this book. To affirm the editors' and authors' gratitude, all royalties earned by this book will be split between these two organizations and the funds made available for projects undertaken by future presidents. We are also grateful to Cheri Stahl for her help in collating the manuscript and for her invaluable assistance at all stages of the book. We believe the book is unique in its approach to critical thinking in taking different areas of psychology and discussing critical thinking in each of them. But we acknowledge that there have been and continue to be many other fine books on critical thinking in psychology; we believe that, together, they will help the students of tomorrow become not just knowledgeable about the field but able to think critically about and within it.

Finally, we wish to point out that the development of the book did show that our two organizations could work together seamlessly. Never in the course of its development did we have the slightest problem pertaining to collaboration. All three of us are now done with our organizational presidencies. But we continue to value the importance of our organizations – APA and APS – and their role in developing critical thinking in students of psychology – today, tomorrow, and always.