

## KNOWLEDGE DOESN'T EXIST AND OTHER THOUGHTS ON CRITICAL THINKING

Critical thinking (CT) is essential in education, the workplace and everyday life, yet many struggle to understand or apply it effectively. This book breaks down the 'what, how and when' of CT in a clear, accessible way, making it practical for readers from all walks of life. Drawing on almost twenty years of researching CT, Dr Christopher Dwyer presents accessible, evidence-based lessons and strategies for using CT in real-world situations, helping readers navigate the overwhelming flood of information we face daily. Written in an informal, engaging tone, this book makes CT approachable for anyone looking to improve their decision-making skills.

DR CHRISTOPHER DWYER is a senior psychology researcher and lecturer at the Technological University of the Shannon, in the Department of Technology Education. He has authored over forty peer-reviewed research papers; an ongoing blog for *Psychology Today*, *Thoughts on Thinking*; as well as this book's predecessor, *Critical Thinking: Historical Perspectives & Practical Guidelines*, published by Cambridge University Press in 2017.

KNOWLEDGE DOESN'T  
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*For Mara*

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## *Foreword*

I started studying critical thinking, and first edited a book on it, four decades ago. At the time, I was one of many psychologists and editors who believed critical thinking was a construct whose time had come. We all knew at the time the importance of critical thinking: our goal was for this importance to be recognized in action – in teaching and testing in schools and in society in general. At the time, the prospects looked bright: education was in a busy period of reform and societies were looking for ways to improve upon their educational offerings, especially to diverse students who in the past had been underserved. The prospects looked especially bright because James Flynn, a philosopher at the University of Otago, had discovered what came to be called the Flynn effect – the increase of IQs around the world by thirty points during the twentieth century. If people were indeed so much smarter, it seemed, they all should be in a good position to enhance their critical thinking and to function at more advanced cognitive levels than had been true in the past.

That, of course, was all then. It was before the current age, when the combination of social media and now generative AI threaten the prospects of any serious critical thinking at all. Social media have lowered attention spans, successfully stifled critical thinking, or even the perceived need for it, and brought into prominence the notion that feelings matter a whole lot, almost certainly more than carefully curated thoughts.

Meanwhile, Kellyanne Conway, an American in the first presidential administration of Donald Trump, introduced the notion of ‘alternative facts’, which appear to be fictions that one accepts as facts because it is convenient to do so. Meanwhile, aspiring autocrats and other populist politicians learned how to use social media and other modern means of communication to persuade people that whatever grievances they have, they are real, and they are someone else’s fault.

One would hope that schools would have successfully countered the effects of social media and too much time on screens through their

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assiduous teaching of critical thinking, and perhaps that would have happened were it not for the COVID pandemic that broke out in 2020. Suddenly, for many students, screens became all they had. They were omnipresent. Since the pandemic, many schools have largely switched to screen-based education. Many students are scarcely learning to think critically. Their loss may be in part due to an increasingly unused ability that is getting rusty, yet also in part due to an attitude that critical thinking was once important, but, in the current age of memes, it is passé.

Dr Christopher P. Dwyer's book on critical thinking thus has special relevance in our current age. Whereas once I might have hoped that by the mid-2020s, critical thinking would be so common that we hardly need another book on it, the opposite has proved to be true. Critical thinking is becoming increasingly less common, and we have a greater need for a book such as this one than perhaps we have ever had before. We all are fortunate, therefore, that Dwyer has written this book at a time when the world is so challenged to teach its younger people to think critically. The book covers the important topics in the field and is a needed, valuable and highly readable contribution not only to the field of critical thinking but to our armamentarium of texts that can teach students to think critically before the world descends further into chaos, and it becomes too late.

**Robert J. Sternberg**