

CRITICAL THINKING IN PSYCHOLOGY

Good scientific research depends on critical thinking at least as much as 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 shows students and researchers how to think critically about key topics such as experimental research, statistical inference, case studies, logical fallacies, and ethical judgments. Using updated research findings and new insights, this volume provides a comprehensive overview of what critical thinking is and how to teach it in psychology. Written by leading experts in critical thinking in psychology, each chapter contains useful pedagogical features, such as critical thinking questions, brief summaries, and definitions of key terms. It also supplies descriptions of each chapter author's critical thinking experience, which evidences how critical thinking has made a difference to facilitating career development.

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Second Edition

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Preface

More than a decade ago, we coedited with Henry Roediger, III, a volume on *Critical Thinking in Psychology*, published by Cambridge University Press. The goal then, as now, was to promote critical thinking in the field of psychology. But the world has changed greatly in the past twelve years:

- Students rely much more on unedited Internet content than they did in the past. Often, they accept what they read without thinking about it critically.
- At the same time, students rely much less on carefully edited and fact-vetted textbooks than they did before. Indeed, the textbook industry is in something of a turmoil because it has become so hard to sell books. Some students, it appears, read hardly at all.
- Despite some textbooks claiming to emphasize critical thinking, the reading levels of textbooks continue on a downward trend. (The average adult in the US reads at a 7th or 8th grade level.)
- Students of psychology need to learn to think in a different way. A decade ago, terms like “registered replications,” “preregistration of hypotheses and data analyses,” “results-free reviewing,” and the like either did not exist or were not relevant to the life of a psychologist, whether a student or a professional. HARKing (hypothesizing after results are known) was standard practice. So-called *p*-hacking (collecting data as needed to reach a hoped-for *p* value) was not only common, but in many institutions, encouraged. Critical thinking today thus is not even quite the same as what it was back then.
- The results of “uncritical” thinking today are in some ways more severe. In the past, at worst, one was privately excoriated by confidential journal or grant reviewers. Today, there is an active “industry” of bloggers and other psychological scientists who go after and sometimes attack those whose work they believe does not represent sound critical

thinking. Sometimes, the blogs themselves represent thinking that is less than critical.

- We live in an age in which, frankly, many people have begun to wonder whether our society as a whole and its governing officers have lost their ability to think critically. Officials at the highest levels of government talk about “alternative facts” or argue that “truth isn’t truth.”

If ever there has been a need for a volume on critical thinking, we believe that time is now. Psychologists, who study thinking and factors that affect thinking, should be in an excellent position to encourage, teach for, and assess critical thinking. But how should they go about doing these things? And how can they do so in a way that will encourage transfer of training not only to psychology courses, but also to people’s everyday professional and personal lives?

In this collection, we present essays by some of the foremost experts on critical thinking in the field of psychology. The book is oriented toward students of psychology who hope to learn how to improve their critical thinking skills, and also to instructors who seek to teach and assess for critical thinking.

In order to facilitate attainment of our goals, we have asked all authors to include in their chapters:

- Key terms (stated and defined), so that users of the book can be sure they understand what the key terms are and how they are defined.
- A chapter summary, so that readers will have a sense of the main issues discussed in each chapter.
- Critical thinking about critical thinking questions (at least five per chapter), so that readers can think critically about what they have learned with regard to critical thinking.
- A section in each chapter on how critical thinking has played an important role in the author’s own professional career, so that readers can see how the authors apply their own ideas about critical thinking to their work and their lives.

We hope you find the book useful in learning about critical thinking and also for improving your own and others’ critical thinking.