



# 学会提问

第11版·英文版

ASKING THE RIGHT  
QUESTIONS

A Guide to Critical Thinking  
(11th Edition)

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清华大学出版社  
北 京



北京市版权局著作权合同登记号 图字: 01-2018-8794

Authorized Reprint from the English language edition, entitled ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS: A GUIDE TO CRITICAL THINKING, ELEVENTH EDITION, 978-0321907950 by M. NEIL BROWNE, STUART M. KEELEY published by Pearson Education, Inc, Copyright © 2015 Pearson Education, Inc.

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ENGLISH language edition published by TSINGHUA UNIVERSITY PRESS LIMITED, Copyright © 2020.

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#### 图书在版编目(CIP)数据

学会提问:第11版 = Asking the Right Questions: A Guide to Critical Thinking(11th Edition): 英文 / (美) M. 尼尔·布朗 (M. Neil Browne), (美) 斯图尔特·M. 基利 (Stuart M. Keeley) 著. —11版. —北京:清华大学出版社, 2020.8  
(新时代·职场新技能)  
ISBN 978-7-302-53303-0

I. ①学… II. ①M… ②斯… III. ①提问—言语交往—通俗读物—英文 IV. ①B842.5-49

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(2020)第 043447 号

责任编辑:刘洋  
封面设计:徐超  
版式设计:方加青  
责任校对:王荣静  
责任印制:杨艳

出版发行:清华大学出版社

网 址: <http://www.tup.com.cn>, <http://www.wqbook.com>

地 址:北京清华大学学研大厦 A 座

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质 量 反 馈:010-62772015, zhiliang@tup.tsinghua.edu.cn

印 装 者:三河市国英印务有限公司

经 销:全国新华书店

开 本:148mm×210mm

印 张:8.375 字 数:223 千字

版 次:2020 年 8 月第 1 版

印 次:2020 年 8 月第 1 次印刷

定 价:69.00 元

产品编号:080855-01





## 序 言

“我知道做个慎思明辨的人挺好的，会问很多恰到好处的问题也挺不错，可我就是不知道该问哪些问题，也不知道怎么个问法。”很多人不知道怎样切实有效地提出一些批判性问题，希望我们能提供较为详尽的指导，鉴于此，我们专门撰写了这本书，以满足大家的需求，目前这已是本书的第 11 版了。只有学会独立思考和判断，也只有经过批判性问题的层层考验后形成的决定和信念，才让我们觉得更加理直气壮。任何东西想要进入我们的头脑，首先就得接受我们信奉的一些特定标准的检验，我们为此倍感自豪。

从开始写作时起，本书就一直处于不断改进之中，我们不断汲取来自我们的学生以及使用本书的广大教师的意见和建议。一方面，我们为本书的大获成功以及来自很多国家的广大读者的积极反馈而感到无比振奋，另一方面我们又觉得任重而道远，觉得还需要付出前所未有的巨大努力来教导公众如何“提出正确的问题”。新的意见和建议一多，对哪些需要牢牢把握，哪些可以不予考虑，以及诸如此类的取舍也就越来越难做。每天都有人想尽一切办法要说服我们，跟我们死缠烂打，其中很多人都喜欢钻牛角尖走极端，而他们的论说诉诸情感的成分多，诉诸理智的成分少。记不清在多少次的公开讨论中，我们遭遇到普遍的极度无视证据、语言草率、错把声高当有理的情况。满足于似是而非，或者说对真相漠不关心的态度正变得越来越普遍。

我们一心追求的是，希望修订本既能保持这本书的主要特色，同时又能适当调整内容以适应我们新的思考重点和读者不断演化的新需求。比如说，我们首先想保留本书简明扼要、清楚易懂以及篇幅短小



## II Asking the Right Questions

的特色。经验告诉我们，这本小书出色地完成了它的既定目标——传授批判性思考和提问的技能。40 多年向学生传授批判性思维技能的经验也让我们确信，尽管学生们能力有差异、术业有专攻，只要我们用简单易懂的方法向他们传授批判性思维的技能，他们很快就能成功地将其应用于各种实践。在学以致用过程中，他们的信心逐步增强，在重大社会问题和个人问题方面，他们做出理性抉择的能力也与日俱增，哪怕面对从前极少经历过的重大问题，他们也一样可以应对自如。

正因如此，本书才能实现其一贯秉持的，而其他书籍却无法实现的一系列目标。它将使学生掌握一整套提问的技能，并且这些技能还可以被广泛应用于各个领域。对这些技能的训练都是在轻松、自然的讨论中展开的。（我们的读者对象是普通大众，而不是什么专业人士。）

本书最为显著的特色之一就是它的适用范围远远超出了你的想象，延伸到形形色色的生活实践之中。与批判性思维联系在一起的种种习惯和态度，可以被灵活运用到消费、医疗、法律及一般伦理和个人的抉择当中。当外科医生说需要动手术时，为本书所倡导的关键问题（critical questions）寻找答案就有可能变成生死攸关的事情。此外，坚持用这些批判性思维提问也可以巩固我们不断增长的知识，帮助我们更快地发现世界运行的规律，更好地理解这个世界，以及懂得怎样做才能让世界变得更美好。

谁会觉得本书特别有用呢？鉴于我们的教学经验里涵盖了各种不同水平和层次的学生，我们很难想象出这本书对哪一门专业或课程派不上用场。事实上，本书前 10 版曾被广泛应用于法律、英语、制药学、哲学、教育学、心理学、社会学、宗教学以及各种门类的社科课程，同时还被普遍应用于无数的中学教学课堂里。

本书特别适合在以下几个领域中应用。普通教育学课程的老师在第一堂课时就可以布置学生阅读这本书，这样当学生刨根问底地想知道他们能从这门课当中学到什么的时候，本书就能一股脑儿地回答他们的问题。当教师在英语课上训练学生写作说明文时，也可使用本书，





## 序 言 III

不仅在构思文章前可用它来参考怎样客观评价各种不同的议论，而且同时还能用它来提醒学生在写作中应当设法避免的一系列问题。对于那些专门用来培养学生批判性阅读和思考技能的课程，本书自然可以成为课堂上的重中之重。

新版的特色主要包括以下五个方面。

第一，我们特意增加一章新的内容，专门用来探讨各种认知偏见以及缜密的批判性思维会遭遇的其他障碍。

第二，我们吸收了丹尼尔·卡尼曼（Daniel Kahneman）所著的《思考，快与慢》（*Thinking, Fast and Slow*）里的真知灼见，并将它们贯穿到全书当中。我们尤其强调“慢思考”的重要性。

第三，在第 11 版中，我们继续在练习的前几篇文章里采取设问的方式来问自答，即对所读的文章边思考、判断，边加以解答，这好比一个人正努力思考如何评价这篇文章，而读者则在这个人的脑海里旁观整个思考的过程。我们认为，与其直接让读者看答案，不如让他们切身“感受”一下接受、拒绝、修正和组织这个答案的点滴过程，这样他们可以获得更现实的画面，了解用来获取答案的批判性思维的实际应用过程。我们在这里借用著名教育家约翰·加德纳（John Gardner）的一个知名比喻，他曾严厉批评一些教师和培训师，批评他们只向学生展示知识园地里采摘的缤纷花朵，而不给学生看使那束美丽的花环得以呈现的种植、除草、施肥和修剪的整个过程。

第四，我们同时强调了批判性思维的社会属性（或称互动属性）及其现实特征，即一个人提出批判性思考问题的方式，可能会极大影响到他探询行为的价值。例如，很多读者在与人交往时刚要跃跃欲试地秀一秀自己批判性提问的能力，就发现并不是每个人都乐于见到别人对他们的信念展开批判性盘问。有些互动方法能在批判性的思考者与演说者 / 作者之间激发出更多令人满意的对话，而另一些方法则难以奏效。我们建议，读者一定要注意提问和倾听的策略，以使对话得以顺利进行，而不是迫使对方关闭对话的渠道。比如说，有人一听完



#### IV Asking the Right Questions

问题就会来这么一句：“你怎么单单就盯上我了呢？”而这样的做法常常会让批判性追问的进程就此戛然而止，没了下文。

第五，我们添加了许多新的例子和练习文章，更频繁地触及当前的热点问题，体现批判性思维在现实生活中的价值和应用。

虽然本书主要是从我们的课堂教学经验中总结出来的，但它的目标在于指导绝大多数人培养更佳的阅读和倾听习惯。对于它旨在培养的种种技能，任何一个不盲从、盲信的读者都需要将之拿来用作理性判断的基础。本书所反复强调的批判性问题可以提高我们的论证能力，不管我们受过的正规教育有多少。你在书里的收获，相信会大大出乎你的意料。





## PREFACE

“I know it’s good to be a critical thinker and to be able to ask lots of good questions, but I don’t know what questions to ask or how to ask them.” We are now on our 11th edition of a book that we wrote in response to sensing the need for providing more guidance for the process of effectively asking critical questions. Democracy works best with a public capable of critical thinking! We can be more confident of our decisions and beliefs when we have formed them after asking critical questions. We can be proud that before anything gets into our heads, it passes particular standards that we respect.

From the beginning, our book has been a work in progress, as we continue to incorporate input from our students and from the many teachers using this book. While we continue to be immensely pleased by this book’s success and the positive feedback from many readers from many countries, we cannot also help but notice the need for a greater-than-ever expansion of efforts to educate the public in “asking the right questions.” Selecting which new suggestions to embrace and which to reject has become increasingly difficult. We are bombarded daily with efforts to persuade us, many of which are highly polarized and appeal much more to the emotional part of the brain than to the reasoning part. We encounter a general, immense disrespect for evidence, the sloppy use of language, and substitution of hollering for reason in so much of our public discussion. “Truthiness,” or a lack of concern for the truth, becomes more and more common.

Always uppermost in our mind has been the desire to retain the





## VI Asking the Right Questions

primary attributes of *Asking the Right Questions*, while adjusting to new emphases in our own thought and the evolving needs of our readers. For instance, we want most of all to keep this book concise, readable, and short. Also, our experience has convinced us that the short book succeeds in the job for which it was intended—the teaching of critical-thinking questioning skills. Our experience in teaching critical-thinking skills to our students over four decades has convinced us that when individuals with diverse abilities are taught these skills in a simplified format, they can learn to apply them successfully. In the process, they develop greater confidence in their ability to make rational choices about social issues and personal issues, even those with which they have formerly had little experience.

Thus, our book continues to do a number of things that other books have failed to do. This text develops an integrated series of question-asking skills that can be applied widely. These skills are discussed in an informal style. (We have written to a general audience, not to any specialized group.)

One feature that deserves to be highlighted is the applicability of *Asking the Right Questions* to numerous life experiences extending far beyond the classroom. The habits and attitudes associated with critical thinking are transferable to consumer, medical, legal, general ethical and personal choices. When a surgeon says surgery is needed, it can be life sustaining to seek answers to the critical questions encouraged in *Asking the Right Questions*. In addition, practicing the critical-thinking questions enhances our growth of knowledge in general and helps us better discover the way the world is, how it could be better understood, and how we can make it a better world.

Who would find *Asking the Right Questions* especially beneficial? Because of our teaching experiences with readers representing many different levels of ability, we have difficulty envisioning any academic





course or program for which this book would not be useful. In fact, the first nine editions have been used in law, English, pharmacy, philosophy, education, psychology, sociology, religion, and social science courses, as well as in numerous high school classrooms.

A few uses for the book seem especially appropriate. Teachers in general education programs may want to begin their courses by assigning this book as a coherent response to their students' requests to explain what is expected of them. English courses that emphasize expository writing could use this text both as a format for evaluating arguments prior to constructing an essay and as a checklist of problems that the writer should attempt to avoid as she writes. The text can also be used as the central focus of courses designed specifically to teach critical reading and thinking skills.

While *Asking the Right Questions* stems primarily from our classroom experiences, it is written so that it can guide the reading and listening habits of almost everyone. The skills that it seeks to develop are those that any critical reader needs to serve as a basis for rational decisions. The critical questions stressed in the book can enhance anyone's reasoning, regardless of the extent of his or her formal education.

The special features of this new edition include the following:

1. We added an entire new chapter focusing on the role of cognitive biases and other obstacles to careful critical thinking.
2. Throughout the book, we have integrated insights from Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. We especially emphasize the importance of slow thinking.
3. We continue with think-aloud answers for early practice passages—expressing critical-thinking responses to a passage as if the reader were inside the head of a person struggling with the challenge of evaluating the practice passages. We think that “hearing” the bit-by-



## VIII Asking the Right Questions

bit process of accepting, rejecting, revising, and organizing an answer gives the reader a more realistic picture of the actual critical-thinking process used to achieve an answer than would simply observing an answer. Here we are relying on the important metaphor of John Gardner who chastised teachers and trainers for showing learners only the cut flowers of knowledge and not the planting, weeding, fertilizing, and pruning that result in a beautiful bouquet.

4. We also emphasize the social or interactive nature of critical thinking and the real-world reality that the way in which one asks critical-thinking can greatly influence the value of the questioning. For example, many readers initially flexing their critical-questioning muscles with others find that not everyone welcomes the critical questioning of their beliefs. Some interactive approaches stimulate much more satisfactory dialogues between the critical thinker and the speaker or writer than others. We suggest questioning and listening strategies to keep the conversation going rather than shutting it down. For example, critical questioning will often be brought to a quick halt by a listener's response of, "Why are you picking on me?"
5. We have inserted many new examples and practice passages to provide frequent engagement with contemporary issues and to demonstrate critical thinking's real-life value and application.

### **Instructor's Manual**

An Instructor's Manual provides comprehensive assistance for teaching with Asking the Right Questions. Instructors may download this supplement at <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/> or request access through their local Pearson representative.

This 11th edition owes special debts to many people. We wish to





acknowledge the valuable advice of the following Pearson reviewers: Diane K. Lofstrom Miniell, University of Nevada, Reno; Clarissa M. Uttley, Plymouth State University; John Saunders, Huntingdon College; Joshua Hayden, Cumberland University; and Leslie St. Martin, College of the Canyons.

While our students are always a major source of suggested improvements, a few distinguished themselves in that regard. The 11th edition benefited from the especially valuable assistance of Lauren Biksacky, Chelsea Brown, and Cassandra Baker.

If you are fascinated by questions and the significance of habitual questioning for our mental development, please join Neil Browne in discussing the complicated relationship between questions and answers at his blog: “A Celebration of Probing Questions and Humble Answers.” [www.celebratequestions.com](http://www.celebratequestions.com)

*M. Neil Browne*

*Stuart M. Keeley*

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## CHAPTER

# 1

# The Benefit and Manner of Asking the Right Questions

## THE NOISY, CONFUSED WORLD WE LIVE IN

This book encourages you to learn something we think can change your life for the better. That something is “critical thinking.” But there is an imaginary world that some of us inhabit where there is no need at all for critical thinking. In this imaginary world several conditions prevail:

1. We are each allowed the independence to make decisions about religion, politics, and what we will and will not buy or believe. Advertisers, marketers, public relations specialists, campaign managers, and advocates of various worldviews will provide us only the information that we need to make decisions that result in building a life that *we* choose.



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2. Anyone trying to persuade us of anything will always explain the disadvantages of what he or she wants us to do.
3. Any time we are confused about one of life's important questions, we can quickly find a dependable expert, authority, or wise person. Furthermore, these voices of knowledge will all agree with one another. In short, we need not be anxious about what to do or believe because the wise ones will have the answer. Our task is simply to locate and listen to them.
4. Our minds are calm, engaged, reflective, and curious whenever faced with an important choice.

We hope you realize that the world we actually live in is nothing like the Never-Never Land, we just described.

In the real world, we are assaulted on all sides by others who insist that we *must* do what they tell us we should do. They know best. They know what we should wear, eat, buy, and believe. They claim to possess a truth that we must accept. They say they want to help us. They will not leave us alone to form our own understanding of who we should become.

As an illustration, in a 5-minute Internet search we found the following advice with respect to the relatively simple question: Should we use more tea? These were all found on web sites urging you to buy more tea.

- Use green tea to ease itching and swelling.
- Use strong tea as a disinfectant on cuts and bruises.
- Use strong tea to treat athlete's foot. Bathe the foot twice a day for ten minutes for up to several weeks.
- Press rehydrated tealeaves on teeth to reduce the pain of toothache.
- Chewing rehydrated tealeaves cleanses the breath.
- Soak a towel in warm tea, and place the towel on tired eyes to refresh them.



- Wash the face with warm tea to reduce skin rashes and pimples.
- Rinse washed hair with strong tea for shine and softness.

The people making these claims want us to change our behavior. Planning to buy more tea?

To make matters worse, those trying to persuade us do not play fair as they try to shape us. They tell us half-truths at best. The socialist does not explain the dangers of a large government. The conservative does not explain to us the severe inequality in our country that makes it very difficult for many of us to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. The people selling us the latest jeans do not explain to us that the low prices they claim to charge are possible only because they exploit workers in Asia. The drug companies who tell us we need the yellow or blue pill to solve our problems do not explain to us that much of the research that supports the effectiveness of the drugs was paid for by the very companies selling you the drugs. We think you get the picture.

But the scenario we are sketching here would not be much of a problem if we could depend on the wise people, the experts, to have the answers we need. If they could give us the right answers we could resist the noisy persuaders. But when we need those who claim to have the answers, they are not there for us. They are often wrong, and they disagree among themselves. The next section emphasizes the significance of this reality for you and how you think.

Chapter 2 will focus on ways in which our brains often fail us as we try to handle our messy, confusing world. Sometimes our brains perform amazing imaginative and complex tasks. But the human brain is frequently guided by what Daniel Kahneman calls “fast thinking” or “System 1 thinking.” Our brains often rely on patterns of thinking that get us into trouble. Fast thinking is automatic, immediate and typically controlled by



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our emotions. Jonathan Haidt has described our reliance on emotion as a raging elephant tearing through the countryside with our rational tendencies taking the form of a tiny rider trying desperately to control the elephant's passionate rampage.

### EXPERTS CANNOT RESCUE US, DESPITE WHAT THEY SAY

We already made the point that if you expect to lean on experts as the tool with which to wade through the multitude of people wishing to own your mind, you are in for a big disappointment. They often sound as if they know far more than they do. They probably understand at some level that you are much more likely to listen to them when they sound certain about what they claim to be true. So, they give you what you want to hear.

But we want to drive this point home to you by 3 examples from David Freedman's important 2010 book, *Wrong: Why Experts Keep Failing Us*

1. Should you stay out of the sun? The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention says that exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays may be the most important factor influencing the development of skin cancer. In short, stay out of the sun. But wait. The World Health Organization says exposure to ultraviolet light is a minor contributor to disease in the world. Then to confuse us all the more they add that too little exposure to the sun may cause more disease in the world than does exposure to the sun.
2. Does it make sense to buy a pet as a means of having better health? The American Heart Association says that many studies have demonstrated the positive effect of pet ownership on the owner's health. However, a reliable study in Finland found that pet ownership is linked to poor health.





3. Do cell phones emit harmful radiation? The Director of the International Epidemiology Institute says there is no basis for believing that cell phones produce harmful emissions. But an expert linked to a South Carolina Hospital has a quite different response to this question. He claims there is sufficient evidence to justify a health advisory warning about the link between cell phones and cancer.

Respected experts disagree about how to create a prosperous middle class, whether there will be future jobs available for college students who major in particular areas of study, whether the knee you injured requires surgery, whether Obama is a strong leader, how to lose weight and keep it off, and when an immigrant should be granted citizenship. Experts provide us more or less reasonable assertions. They give us the materials for a thoughtful decision. But we are the craftsman who must measure and construct those assertions into a decision that is ours.

We need to be very careful here. We are definitely not saying that experts cannot be helpful. Indeed, we cannot function without depending on people who we think might have knowledge we can use. In a sense, we are encouraging you to pay even more attention to experts than you might already give them. But, as will be clear soon, we need to listen to experts of many different kinds, sorting and discarding as we listen and evaluate. We listen to them to construct *our* answer. We do not listen to them to follow their advice, as if we were but a helpless lamb or a puppet on the expert's string.

## THE NECESSITY OF RELYING ON OUR MIND

Once we have a clear grasp of where we live in the sense of the environment in which we make decisions, we come face to face with a heavy responsibility: WE MUST ASSERT RATIONAL CONTROL OF OUR BELIEFS AND CONCLUSIONS. THE ALTERNATIVE IS BEING THE



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MENTAL SLAVE OF WHOEVER IMPRESSES OUR SYSTEM 1 BRAIN.

Critical Thinking teaches you skills and attitudes that make you proud to have rationally discovered answers that make sense to you. Critical thinking encourages you to listen to and learn from others, while at the same time weighing the quality of what others say. In this regard, you are learning that we must depend on others, but only selectively. Critical thinking thereby liberates you, empowering you to be the supervisor of who you are becoming.

### CRITICAL THINKING TO THE RESCUE

Listening and reading critically—that is, reacting with systematic evaluation to what you have heard and read—requires a set of skills and attitudes. These skills and attitudes are built around a series of related critical questions. While we will learn them one by one, our goal is to be able to use them as a unit to identify the best decision available. Ideally, asking these questions will become part of who you are, not just something you studied in a book.

**Critical thinking**, as we will use the term, refers to the following:

1. awareness of a set of interrelated critical questions;
2. ability to ask and answer these critical questions in an appropriate manner; and
3. desire to actively use the critical questions.

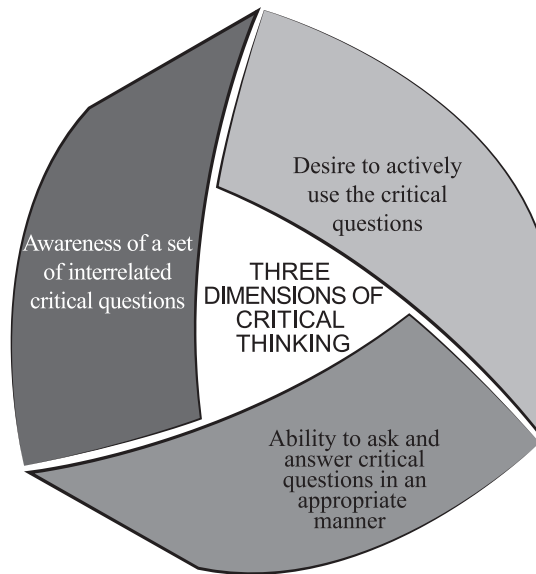
The goal of this book is to encourage you in all three of these dimensions.

Questions require the person being asked the question to do something in response. By our questions, we are saying to the person: “I am curious”; “I want to know more”; “help me.” This request shows respect for the other person. Critical questions exist to inform and provide direction for all who



hear them. In that respect, critical thinking begins with the desire to improve what we think. The critical questions are also useful in improving your own writing and speaking because they will assist you when you:

1. react critically to an essay or to evidence presented in a textbook, in a periodical, or on a Web site;
2. judge the quality of a lecture or a speech;



Three Dimensions of Critical Thinking

3. form an argument;
4. write an essay based on a reading assignment; or
5. participate in class.



**Attention:** Critical thinking consists of an awareness of a set of interrelated critical questions, plus the ability and willingness to ask and answer them at appropriate times.





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### THE SPONGE AND PANNING FOR GOLD: ALTERNATIVE THINKING STYLES

One common approach to thinking is similar to the way in which a sponge reacts to water: by absorbing. This popular approach has some clear advantages.

First, the more information you absorb about the world, the more capable you are of understanding its complexities. Knowledge you have acquired provides a foundation for more complicated thinking later.

A second advantage of the sponge approach is that it is relatively passive. Rather than requiring strenuous mental effort, it tends to be rather quick and easy, especially when the material is presented in a clear and interesting fashion. Though absorbing information provides a productive start toward becoming a thoughtful person, the sponge approach also has a serious and devastating disadvantage: It provides no method for deciding which information and opinions to believe and which to reject. If a reader relied on the sponge approach all the time, he would believe whatever he read last.

We think you would rather choose for yourself what to absorb and what to ignore. To make this choice, you must read with a special attitude—a questionasking attitude. Such a thinking style requires active participation. The writer is trying to speak to you, and you should try to talk back to him, even though he is not physically present.

We call this interactive approach the panning-for-gold style of thinking. The process of panning for gold provides a model for active readers and listeners as they try to determine the worth of what they read and hear. Distinguishing the gold from the gravel in a conversation requires you to ask frequent questions and to reflect on the answers.



The sponge approach emphasizes knowledge acquisition; the panning-for-gold approach stresses active interaction with knowledge as it is being acquired. Thus, the two approaches complement each other. To pan for intellectual gold, there must be something in your pan to evaluate. In addition, to evaluate arguments, we must possess knowledge, that is, dependable opinions.

Let us examine more closely how the two approaches lead to different behavior. What does the individual who takes the sponge approach do when he reads material? He reads sentences carefully, trying to remember as much as he can. He may underline or highlight key words and sentences. He may take notes summarizing the major topics and major points. He checks his underlining or notes to be sure that he is not forgetting anything important. His mission is to find and understand what the author has to say. He memorizes the reasoning, but doesn't evaluate it.

What does the reader who takes the panning-for-gold approach do? Like the person using the sponge approach, she approaches her reading with the hope that she will acquire new knowledge. There the similarity ends. The panning-for-gold approach requires that the reader ask herself a number of questions designed to uncover the best available decisions or beliefs.

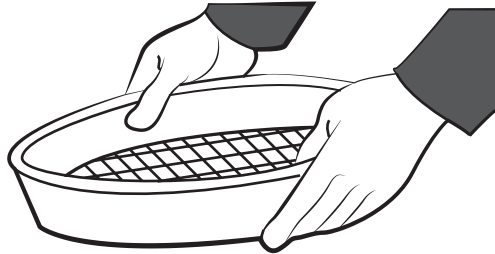
The reader who uses the panning-for-gold approach frequently questions why the author makes various claims. She writes notes to herself in the margins indicating problems with the reasoning. She continually interacts with the material. Her intent is to critically evaluate the material and formulate personal conclusions based on the evaluation.

The most important characteristic of the panning-for-gold approach is interactive involvement—a dialogue between the writer and the reader, or the speaker and the listener. As a critical thinker, you are willing to agree with others, but first you need some convincing answers to your questions.





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Did I ask “why” someone wants me to believe something?

Did I take notes as I thought about potential problems with what was being said?

Did I evaluate what was being said?

Did I form my own conclusion about the topic based on the reasonableness of what was said?

### Mental Checklist for Panning for Gold

The inadequacies in what someone says will not always leap out at you. You must be an *active* reader and listener. You can do this by *asking questions*. The best search strategy is a critical-questioning strategy. A powerful advantage of these questions is that they permit you to ask probing questions even when you know very little about the topic being discussed. For example, you do not need to be an expert on child care to ask critical questions about the adequacy of day-care centers.

## WEAK-SENSE AND STRONG-SENSE CRITICAL THINKING

Previous sections mentioned that you already have opinions about many personal and social issues. You are willing right now to take a position on





such questions as: Should prostitution be legalized? Is alcoholism a disease or willful misconduct? Was George W. Bush a successful president? You bring these initial opinions to what you hear and read.

Critical thinking can be used to either (1) defend or (2) evaluate and revise your initial beliefs. Professor Richard Paul's distinction between weak-sense and strong-sense critical thinking helps us appreciate these two antagonistic uses of critical thinking.



**Attention:** *Weak-sense critical thinking is the use of critical thinking to defend your current beliefs. Strong-sense critical thinking is the use of the same skills to evaluate all claims and beliefs, especially your own.*

If you approach critical thinking as a method for defending your present beliefs, you are engaged in *weak-sense critical thinking*. Why is it weak? To use critical-thinking skills in this manner is to be unconcerned with moving toward truth or virtue. The purpose of weak-sense critical thinking is to resist and annihilate opinions and reasoning different from yours. To see domination and victory over those who disagree with you as the objective of critical thinking is to ruin the potentially humane and progressive aspects of critical thinking.

In contrast, *strong-sense critical thinking* requires us to apply the critical questions to all claims, including our own. By forcing ourselves to look critically at our initial beliefs, we help protect ourselves against self-deception and conformity. It is easy to just stick with current beliefs, particularly when many people share them. But when we take this easy road, we run the strong risk of making mistakes we could otherwise avoid.

Strong-sense critical thinking does not necessarily force us to give up our initial beliefs. It can provide a basis for strengthening them because



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critical examination of those beliefs will sometimes reinforce our original commitment to them. Another way of thinking about this distinction is to contrast open- and closed-mindedness. When my mind is open, it welcomes criticism of my own beliefs. But when my mind is closed, the beliefs I have are going to be the ones I keep.

To feel proud of a particular opinion, it should be one we have selected—selected from alternative opinions that we have understood and evaluated.

### The Importance of Practice

Our goal is to make your learning as simple as possible. However, the habit of critical thinking will initially take a lot of practice.

The practice exercises and sample responses at the end of each chapter, except this introductory chapter, are an important part of this text. Our answers are not necessarily the only correct ones, but they do provide illustrations of how to apply the definitions and question-asking skills. We intentionally failed to provide sample answers for the third passage. Our objective is to give you the opportunity to struggle with the answer using your knowledge of the chapter we have just studied. For additional practice opportunities and for online help, go to <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/browne>, where we have placed many helpful hints and practice materials.

## CRITICAL THINKING AND OTHER PEOPLE

### Values and Other People

Think of other people as your most valuable resource, the basis for the facts, opinions, and conclusions that you will eventually have. In an important and ongoing manner, other people are part of your extended family, those who nurture your conclusions. The theme here is connectedness.





How these interactions work is shaped by your values and the values you perceive in those with whom you interact. Before you can discover the importance of values in shaping conclusions, you must have some understanding of what a value is. *Values*, as we will use the term, are ideas that someone thinks are worthwhile. You will find that it is the importance one assigns to *abstract ideas* that has the major influence on one's choices and behavior.

Usually objects, experiences, and actions are desired because of some idea we value. For example, we may choose to do things that provide us with contacts with important people. We value “important people” (concrete idea) because we value “status” (abstract idea). When we use the word *value* in this chapter, we will be referring to an (abstract) idea representing what someone thinks is important and good.



**Attention:** *Values are unstated ideas that people see as worthwhile. They provide standards of conduct by which we measure the quality of human behavior.*

To better familiarize yourself with values, write down some of your own values. Try to avoid writing down the names of people, tangible objects, or actions. Pizza and tennis may be important to you, but it is the importance you assign to abstract ideas that most influences your choices and behavior concerning controversial public issues. Your willingness to argue for or against assisted suicide, for instance, is strongly related to the importance you assign to the sanctity of human life—an abstract idea. As you create your list of values, focus on those that are so significant that they affect your opinions and behavior in many ways.

Do you have problems making your list? We can provide some help.



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Values are *standards of conduct* that we endorse and expect people to meet. When we expect our political representatives to “tell the truth,” we are indicating to them and to ourselves that honesty is one of our most cherished values. Ask yourself how you expect your friends to be. What standards of conduct would you want your children to develop? Answers to these questions should help you enlarge your understanding of values.

Let’s remind ourselves how knowledge about values relates to the social nature of critical thinking. While we must require ourselves to listen carefully to those who have different value priorities than our own, the most obvious social link established by values is similarity. Those of us who see individual responsibility as an extremely important value tend to be comfortable with and to seek out those who similarly believe that *improved personal choices* are the solution to most human problems. Hence, many of our most valuable social interactions or learning experiences start with communications with those who have similar value priorities. Our huge challenge in this regard is to make ourselves work hard to understand the reasoning of those whose value priorities *differ* from ours.

While adventure, ambition, autonomy, comfort, excellence, justice, rationality, tolerance, and spontaneity may be important values to us, it is quite likely that other reasonable people will have important values that conflict with many of these. Our normal tendency to listen to only those with similar value priorities needs our active resistance. We have to fight against the tendency.

### Primary Values of a Critical Thinker

This book is dedicated to help you become a critical thinker. As a critical thinker, you will be pursuing *better* conclusions, *better* beliefs, and *better* decisions. Certain values advance your effort to do so; others do not. By



knowing and appreciating the primary values of a critical thinker, you have some mental muscle that you can use to remind yourself of the necessity of your paying close attention to those who do not share your value priorities. Let's examine these primary values.

1. **Autonomy.** At first this value may seem as if it has little to do with encouraging people to pay attention to those with different perspectives. How does a drive to form one's own conclusions encourage us in any fashion to seek and listen to views that are not our own? Aha! And what raw material should you use in pursuing this autonomy? Surely, we all want to pick and choose from the widest possible array of possibilities; otherwise, we may miss the one decision or option that *we would have chosen* if only we had paid attention to those who did not share our value priorities. For example, Democrats make a huge mistake if they listen only to other Democrats.
2. **Curiosity.** To take advantage of the panning-for-gold method of living your life, you need to listen and read, **really** listen and read. Other people have the power to move you forward, to liberate you from your current condition of partial knowledge. To be a critical thinker requires you to then ask questions about what you have encountered. Part of what you gain from other people is their insights and understanding, **when what they have to offer meets the standards of good reasoning** that you will learn in *Asking the Right Questions*.
3. **Humility.** Recognizing that even the smartest person in the world makes many mistakes each week provides the ideal platform for engaging actively with other people. Certainly some of us have insights that others do not have, but each of us is very limited in what we can do, and at honest moments, we echo Socrates when he said



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that he knew that he did not know. Once we accept this reality, we can better recognize that our experiences with other people can fill in at least a few of the gaps in our present understanding. Also, a sense of humility keeps us from avoiding a very common obstacle to critical thinking, the belief that “those who disagree with me are biased, but I am not.”

4. Respect for good reasoning wherever you find it. While we want to respect and listen to other voices, all conclusions or opinions are not equally worthwhile. The critical questions you will learn as you study this book will provide a framework to assist you in picking and choosing from among all the people trying to influence you. When you find strong reasoning, regardless of the race, age, political party, wealth, or citizenship of the speaker or writer, rely on it until a better set of reasoning comes along.

By all means, act with confidence based on your beliefs, but hold your conclusions with only that degree of firmness that permits you to still wonder to yourself, “Might I be wrong?”

They are *your* opinions, and you quite understandably feel protective of them. Listen as political satirist Stephen Colbert mocks this attitude of ours: “I’m not a fan of facts. You see, the facts can change, but my opinion will never change, no matter what the facts are.”

Anyone determined to keep the conclusions he already has may well use reasons to justify his opinion. However, this kind of reasoning is called “managed reasoning,” meaning that the reasoning is being selected so as to reach a particular conclusion.

## KEEPING THE CONVERSATION GOING

Because critical thinking is a social activity, we need to consider how other



people are likely to react to us when we ask them questions about their beliefs and conclusions. As long as we are interacting with others who share the primary values of critical thinking, our questions will be received as evidence that we are a partner in the search for better answers to the questions we share. But that terrific opportunity to grow together is not going to be the only kind of social interaction you will have.

Many people are not eager to have their thinking questioned; often, they experience questioning as annoying and unfriendly. Some may wonder, “Why is she asking me all these challenging questions? Why does she not just agree with me?” Don’t be surprised if someone reacts to your quest to learn more by asking you why you are being so mean. Many people are unaccustomed to situations where someone is so excited to know more about why a particular viewpoint is held.



Common Understanding of an Argument © Shutterstock

For purposes of critical thinking, an argument is altogether something else. Because we see argument as the mechanism whereby we fertilize and prune our current conclusions, we will use the concept in a very different manner. An *argument* is a combination of two forms of statements: a conclusion and the reasons allegedly supporting it. The partnership between reasons and conclusion establishes a person’s argument. It is something we provide because we care about how people live their lives and what they





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believe. Our continual improvement depends on someone's caring enough about us to offer us arguments and to evaluate the ones we make. Only then will we be able to develop as thoughtful people.

Above all else, when you use your critical-thinking skills, make it clear to other people that you want to learn. Furthermore, give them assurances that you wish them well and that any disagreement you have with them, as serious and important as that disagreement might be, need not result in a verbal bloodbath. What follows are a few verbal strategies that you can use to keep the conversation going:

1. Try to clarify your understanding of what the other person intends by asking, "Did I hear you say?"
2. Ask the other person whether there is any evidence that would cause him to change his mind.
3. Suggest a time-out in which each of you will try to find the very best evidence for the conclusion you hold.
4. Ask why the person thinks the evidence on which you are relying is so weak.
5. Try to come together. If you take that person's best reasons and put them together with your best reasons, is there some conclusion that both of you could embrace?
6. Search for common values or other shared conclusions to serve as a basis for determining where the disagreement first appeared in your conversation.
7. Try to present a model of caring and calm curiosity; as soon as the verbal heat turns up, try to remind yourselves that you are learners, not warriors.
8. Make certain that your face and body suggest humility, rather than the demeanor of a know-it-all.



## Creating a Friendly Environment for Communication

As a writer or speaker, you are faced with an important choice. You have to decide the type of environment you'll create for your audience. Will you choose one that is hostile to people who disagree with your conclusions? In the current polarized climate, the temptation is great. Just look at the tactics employed during the American election season—the tactics the *Daily Show*'s Jon Stewart mocked when he said, "I disagree with you, but I am pretty sure you're not Hitler."

In the spirit of this Jon Stewart quote, you could choose to create an environment in which reasonable people can productively and respectfully disagree—an environment that welcomes discussion and question-asking. Of course we prefer this approach, but let's be honest: There are some compelling reasons to write in a tone that excludes, even shoots down, critical thinkers.

First, it's easier to shoot down a hard question than to consider and respond to it. Plus, you'll surely sound authoritative, daring your audience to challenge your expert judgment. Not to mention that this writing style can even be fun. Have you ever read and enjoyed a vicious review of a movie, book, album, or video game?

Take a look at the tone and word choice in this review of the 2009 box office success *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. Popular film critic Roger Ebert suggested:

If you want to save yourself the ticket price, go into the kitchen, cue up a male choir singing the music of hell, and get a kid to start banging pots and pans together. Then close your eyes and use your imagination.

Just try to convince him that he should calm down and reconsider.