

Gather INFORMATION

Information includes the facts, data, evidence, or experiences we use to figure things out. It does not necessarily imply accuracy or correctness.

- What information do I need to answer this question?
- How do I know my data are accurate?
- Have I left out any important information that I need to consider?

Understand Your POINT OF VIEW

Point of view is literally “the place” from which you view something. It includes what you are looking at and the way you are seeing it.

- What exactly am I focused on? And how am I seeing it?
- Is my view the only reasonable view? What does my view ignore?
- What is the point of view of the author of this story?

Clarify Your CONCEPTS

Concepts are ideas, theories, laws, principles, or hypotheses we use in thinking to make sense of things.

- What idea am I using in my thinking? Is this idea causing problems for me or others?
- What main distinctions should I draw in reasoning through this problem?
- What idea is this author using in his or her thinking? Is there a problem with it?

Watch Your INFERENCES

Inferences are interpretations or conclusions you draw. Inferring is what the mind does in figuring something out.

- What conclusion am I coming to?
- What am I basing my reasoning on?
- Is there an alternative plausible conclusion?

Adapted from: Elder, L. and R. Paul. 2005. The Foundations of Analytic Thinking. The Foundation for Critical Thinking.

Check Your ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions are beliefs you take for granted. They usually operate at the subconscious or unconscious level of thought.

- What am I taking for granted?
- What assumption is leading me to this conclusion?
- What exactly do sociologists (historians, mathematicians, etc.) take for granted?

Think About PURPOSE

Your purpose is your goal, your objective, what you are trying to accomplish. We also use the term to include functions, motives, and intentions.

- What is the author/artist/speaker’s purpose?
- Is the purpose clearly related?
- Is the purpose significant and realistic?

Consider IMPLICATIONS

Implications are the things that *might* happen if you decide to do something. Consequences are the things that *do* happen when you act.

- If I decide to do “X”, what things might happen?
- If I decide not to do “X”, what things might happen?
- How significant are the implications of this decision?

State the QUESTION

The question lays out the problem or issue and guides our thinking. When the question is vague, our thinking will lack clarity and distinctness.

- What is the question I am trying to answer?
- The question in my mind is this: How do you see this question?
- What kind of question is this? Historical? Scientific? Ethical? Political? Or...?