

Integrating Critical Thinking into Extension Programming #2: Developing Critical Thinking Skills¹

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Introduction

Critical thinking is broadly recognized as an important skill to master, and one that has the potential to lead to an individual's success (Lamm et al., 2011). As such, Extension professionals are encouraged to engage clientele in experiences that not only teach subject matter but also develop critical thinking skills. This EDIS document is the second in a series on integrating critical thinking into Extension programming, and examines the virtues of critical thinking to offer suggestions for integrating activities that encourage critical thinking into Extension programming. The entire series includes the following EDIS documents:

1. Critical Thinking Defined (<http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc206>)
2. Developing Critical Thinking Skills (<http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc207>)
3. Critical Thinking Style (<http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc208>)
4. Measuring Critical Thinking Styles Using the UFCTI (<http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc209>)
5. Using Critical Thinking Styles to Enhance Team Work (<http://www.edis.ifas.ufl.edu/wc210>)

The Virtues of Critical Thinking

The American Philosophical Association (1990) brought together a group of experts in the form of a Delphi panel to come up with a set of intellectual virtues or habits that reflect a disposition toward thinking critically. This group believed that by developing an ability to engage in this set of virtues while thinking, ideal critical thinkers could be created. Each virtue is discussed below along with ideas about how to incorporate the development of the virtue in an Extension program. It is important to recognize that it would be difficult to integrate all 15 virtues into a single program or activity, but rather to keep them all in mind when developing educational experiences so that participants gain critical thinking skills over time.

Habitually inquisitive—This virtue suggests that an ideal critical thinker makes a habit out of being inquisitive. To form habits, a participant must be engaged in environments where being inquisitive is encouraged and rewarded. For example, presenting information in a lecture-style PowerPoint where the learner sits and listens while the presenter provides information does not encourage one to be inquisitive. Rather, offering hands-on activities where learners are required to seek out information or find the answers to a problem from among several options encourages the learner to be inquisitive.

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