

Integrating Critical Thinking into Extension Programming #3: Critical Thinking Style¹

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Introduction

Critical thinking, as a cognitive style, “explains how an individual prefers one particular method to another when processing information, or critically thinking about a particular topic” (Gorham, Lamm, & Rumble, 2014, p. 44). While the critical thinking skills someone employs may lead them to different conclusions or solutions to a problem, different viewpoints while solving a problem will be exhibited by differences in critical thinking styles. This EDIS document is the third in a series on integrating critical thinking into Extension programming. It introduces the concept of critical thinking style and describes the two styles of critical thinking. 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>)

Critical Thinking Style

An ideal critical thinker will (1) raise clear questions while processing new information, (2) gather and analyze all information relevant to the situation, (3) come to conclusions through rigorous reasoning and testing, (4) recognize and consider different opinions, and (5) communicate effectively about the solutions they found (Paul & Elder, 2007). Unlike the use of critical thinking skills, critical thinking style describes *the way* an individual goes about thinking and reaching solutions to a problem. Style also determines how an individual communicates about the thought process they used to reach their final solution (Irani, 2006). While there is not a right or a wrong way to think critically, research has shown that critical thinking style can be measured on a continuum between a preference for seeking information and engagement, as shown in Figure 1 (Lamm & Irani, 2011). By understanding more about critical thinking styles, Extension professionals can preemptively create experiences or reach out through specific communication channels that will resonate with a certain style they are trying to reach (Gorham et al., 2014).

Engagement style ←————→ Seeking Information style

Figure 1. Continuum of Critical Thinking Style.
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