

# COMMERCIAL ENGLISH

## 5 CRITICAL THINKING

No.1 - Issued July 2025

© Doing Business In English. All rights reserved.

[www.doingbusinessinenglish.com](http://www.doingbusinessinenglish.com)

## Critical Thinking

Edward Glaser stated, "The ability to think critically, involves three things:

- 1 An attitude of being disposed to consider in a thoughtful way the problems and subjects that come within the range of one's experiences.
- 2 Knowledge of the methods of logical inquiry and reasoning.
- 3 Some skill in applying those methods."

The capacity for critical thinking involves the analysis and evaluation of data to facilitate a practical comprehension, subsequently guiding beliefs and actions.

Critical thinking skills enable the comprehension and tackling of situations utilizing all relevant available facts and information. When leaders utilize these skills, they categorize and arrange facts, data, and other information to identify a problem and formulate effective solutions. Leaders need to constantly evaluate their critical thinking skills and identify those that require development.

Critical thinking typically follows a sequence of steps, beginning with the identification of a problem or issue and culminating with the formulation of a solution. Here are the typical steps involved in employing critical thinking for problem-solving:

- Problem identification.
- Formulate inferences regarding the existence of the problem and potential solutions.
- Gather information or data on the issue through research.
- Organize and categorize data and findings.
- Devise and implement solutions.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the solutions.
- Determine methods for enhancing the solution.

Being an effective critical thinker depends on objectivity; leaders must examine the issue devoid of emotional influence or preconceived notions. Leaders should just examine the issue based on the context and evidence.

There are several critical thinking skills leaders need, from effective communication, observation and analytical skills, to being able to infer accurately, self-regulate, solve problems and judge without bias.

## Elements of Critical Thinking

**“Learn to use your brain power. Critical thinking is the key to creative problem solving in business.” – Richard Branson**

**1 Leaders need to establish what the problem or situation actually is, then identify what factors are behind this happening in the first place.**

**2 They then need to examine the opinions, positions and arguments of all the participants in this process. Whenever there are conflicting perspectives, it is essential that leaders conduct independent research to avoid being swayed by their biases of those of others.**

**3 Information must be evaluated objectively. Leaders should identify the positions and motivations of all of the participants is difficult, but leaders must evaluate information from all sources and make your own judgments.**

**4 Leaders must determine importance and prioritize, determining the most critical facts to evaluate in the present circumstances. Occasionally, it is necessary to exclude data points that lack relevance, but this is an area where they must be careful as outliers can be data that are critical in understanding a situation. Leaders must ensure they have considered all points of view and often disproportionately consider the situation from points of view they do not align with.**

**5 Time needs to be allocated for consideration once all the information has been obtained, then analysis be completed and a strategy formulated.**

**6 Lastly leaders need to share their observations, assessments and strategy. At this point the leader has to sell their position and take people with them, for many leaders this is challenging as it can require selling an unpopular strategy, but leadership often means making tough decisions that are not instantly popular.**

**“The important thing is never to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing.” – Albert Einstein**

**“We are trying to prove ourselves wrong as quickly as possible, because only in that way can we find progress.” - Richard Feynman**

## What to Avoid when Developing Critical Thinking

Many leaders try to appeal to authority or the consensus: they seek to validate their conclusion by referencing an authoritative figure or by citing other recognized people who share the same perspective.

Leaders can allow their biases to make them argue selectively: they disregard alternative viewpoints (cherry-picking)." They must get in the habit of incorporating competing viewpoints as opposing arguments, despite being fundamentally flawed, may contain elements of truth that must be acknowledged.

Circular reasoning: this occurs when a leader uses the premise of an argument as justification for the conclusion and this typically occurs when evidence is absent or overlooked.

Leaders can misinterpret correlation as causation: here they claim that the simultaneous occurrence of two events, particularly when one precedes the other, indicates that one event causes the other. This assumption is unjustified in the absence of more concrete evidence of causation, but both events may be attributable to an alternative factor.

Leaders in a hurry can reach conclusions prematurely: they come to a decisive judgment from a limited amount of evidence, failing to consider their assumptions and the alternatives.

Leaders can overgeneralize and it makes things easier: leaders that presume what applies to one instance applies universally to others.

## Advantages of Critical Thinking

Cultivating and utilizing critical thinking skills can bring several advantages, including enhanced problem-solving capabilities and decision-making proficiency.

- Enhanced understanding and analysis of information.
- Improved communication and argumentative abilities.
- Enhanced objectivity, perception and rationality in cognition.
- Enhanced creativity, ingenuity and innovation.
- Decreased susceptibility to manipulation and disinformation.
- Enhanced self-awareness, learning and personal development.

## How to Develop Critical Thinking Skills when Under Pressure

### **1 Develop the ability to self-criticize**

Leaders must first critically evaluate their own thoughts and actions; growth is simply unattainable without effective self-reflection. Leaders have to learn to deconstruct their own beliefs by inquiring into the rationale behind them. Leaders must accept and recognize their own talents, shortcomings, personal inclinations, and biases such that they can manage their own preconceptions and automatic behaviour.

### **2 Totally engaged open minded listening**

As far as we know it is impossible to simultaneously engage in thought and active listening at the same time. In order to critical thinking, leaders must listen to other people's ideas, arguments, and critiques without formulating a response or reaction during their discourse. Effective absorption of information necessitates dedicated listening, leaders must listen to understand rather than waiting to speak.

### **3 Carefully evaluate the data**

Information analysis is essential for critical thinking, leaders rarely think critically consistently as they are human and not machines. Critical evaluation and analysis is required followed by careful consideration of the implications of the action planned, leaders who are able to step back and examine from an objective perspective will be more successful.

### **4 Respond do not react**

Reacting to a situation doesn't usually result in the best outcome, there are of course occasional exceptions, but often it leads to the escalation of a problem and/or bad judgement. Responding to a situation means accepting it and then having a plan to deal with it constructively, is more effective. Leaders find that most situations have better outcomes when they respond rather than react as it is based on fact-finding and rational thinking. Reacting can often involve communicating in an aggressive manner, with a complete lack of empathy, cooperation of thought as to what impact this reaction will have to the overall relationship.

### **5 Forward thinking**

Forward thinking is the capacity to anticipate the future consequences of a decision, this is an essential skill for leaders, simply going through life reacting in an agile manner has limited success. Leaders should evaluate each action taking into account its potential impact outcomes and individuals, identifying the interrelations between them.

## Critical Thinking Activities

### Defining the Problem as Einstein

Albert Einstein said that if given an hour to solve a problem, he would spend five minutes on the solution and the rest of that hour defining the problem. Critical thinking in problem-solving means knowing exactly what it is you are trying to solve, and that means clearly defining the problem. Identify a problem and then ask these types of questions.

- What are the details of the problem and the challenge?
- What assumptions could be in place? Which should be challenged and how?
- What are you specifically trying to overcome?
- What do you know about this? What do you not know about this?
- Why is this problem worth tackling? What will the benefit be?
- Is this a resource, energy or time-sensitive problem?
- How does this problem affect you, your team, the company or society?
- How would a mentor see the problem?
- Where will you start?
- What milestones will you set and how will you measure progress?
- What is Plan B?

### Einstein's Secret to Effective Problem-Solving - Killer Innovations with Phil McKinney

### How to Solve a Problem According to Einstein - Exploring your mind

### Einstein's Secret to Amazing Problem Solving - The Problem Is To Know What the Problem Is | LinkedIn

### Is this a Fact or an Opinion?

Leaders often have to identify whether something is a fact or an opinion. Facts can be proven either as either true or false whereas an opinion cannot be proven as either true or false. When faced with a complex situation a leader can write down the key elements of the situation on a piece of paper or even better a whiteboard, then add an F next to it if it can be proven or an O if it cannot be proven. Then ask the following.

- How can each element be proven beyond any doubt?
- What bias could exist in each element stated?
- Is there any verified information? How can this be validated?
- Is there anything potentially misleading about each element?
- How reliable are the facts?

### Create a Retrospective Review of Success and Failure

The aim of this exercise is to get the leader to think about what they have done critically and look below the surface. The leader needs to push themselves to think and observe first a successful and then an unsuccessful situation in different ways, looking from several perspectives and mindsets.

- What was the most positive event and outcome?
- What was the most negative event and outcome?
- What was difficult and what mistakes did you make?
- What did you learn?
- How would others have described your behaviour whilst managing this challenge?
- How will you handle a similar position in the future?
- How did the outcome make you feel?
- How would other people you respect have handled the situation differently?
- What could you trial doing differently next time?

### Conduct a SWOT Analysis

A SWOT analysis is a useful tool for leaders to identify where they are and then where they should go.

**Strengths:** "What is the business good at?", "What am I good at?" and "What is the business uniquely good at?"

**Weaknesses:** "What can the business improve at?", "What can I improve at?" and "What is letting down the business?"

**Opportunities:** "What opportunities might there be?", "How can we take these opportunities?"

**Threats:** "What risks are there, and will there be?", "How can I/we manage them?"

## Use the Socratic Method

The Socratic Method can be used by leaders who want to develop their critical thinking skills. Normally in the Socratic Method, a mediator leads a discussion by asking questions, and each question is based upon the response given to the previous question, but a leader can play both the role mediator and answerer. Identify a major challenge faced then follow the questions below.

"What does 'success' mean?" (Big Question)

Then explore further and deeper with:

"Why is it that you think of success that way?"

"What is behind your evaluation of success?"

"How do other people see success?"

"What alternative measurements of success exist?"

Then ask:

"Can a leader be successful if they do not achieve this specific goal?"

"How will winning feel like?"

Look for Real-life Examples:

"Who is someone who succeeded at this? How do you feel about them? Why?"

"Was there a time you saw yourself as a winner? What had happened?"

Consider others' perceptions and opinions:

"How might a leader from another company see and feel about your success?"

"How has your perception of success changed as your career has progressed?"

Find meaning:

"How have your preconceptions of success shaped what you want?"

"In what way are your goals affecting your career and life?"

Review:

"Has your idea of what success is changed by considering it in this exercise? If so how?"

"What have you learnt or become more aware of?"

[Transform Your Team With This Ancient \(but Powerful\) Leadership Method | Entrepreneur](#)

[The Socratic Method in Business: Uncovering the Unknown Unknowns | LinkedIn](#)

[Exploring the Socratic Method to Improve Business Problem-Solving – debatingschool.com](#)

### Counter Arguing

Leaders often do not hear opposing views to their own or do not value them. Therefore, they have to make the counter argument themselves, they should pick a key issue in the company, then create an argument from the commonly accepted side and then try arguing from the opposite side. The leader has to see different viewpoints, challenge assumptions, think deeply and convincingly present an opinion that challenges the accepted view.

[The Art of Counterargument – How You Can Constructively Challenge Business Norms – debatingschool.com](#)

[How do you construct a strong counterargument?](#)

[25 Counterargument Examples \(2025\)](#)

### Journaling Weekly

The life of most leaders is hectic and there is often not time for real reflection. Leaders can write down what happened in the previous week, the choices they made, how they felt and what they learnt. This process of writing prompts consideration of actions, failures and successes plus how they can do better in the future.

<https://hbr.org/2016/01/want-to-be-an-outstanding-leader-keep-a-journal>

[Home - Journaling for Leaders](#)

[18 Journaling Prompts For You To Achieve Your Leadership Goals In 2024](#)

[Journaling Is a Core Practice for Leadership Development](#)

### Mind Mapping

Mind mapping can be really effective for leaders, in this exercise an idea is written in the centre of a piece of paper or whiteboard, then the leader draws lines to related ideas. A map of thoughts is created and demonstrates how everything is connected.

[What is Mind Mapping? What Are Its Uses? | Mindmaps.com](#)

[6 Ways to Use Mind Maps for Business Growth - Venngage](#)

[Mind Mapping For Strategic Planning. Tips for Business Leaders. Pt 1 | LinkedIn](#)

[Free Mind Map Maker - Online Mind Mapping Examples | Canva](#)

**“We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” – Albert Einstein**

### Use Six Thinking Hats

Six Thinking Hats was created by Edward de Bono to solve problems, it makes leaders think in six different ways creating the idea of wearing six different colored hats. An example of this follows.

**White Hat (Facts):** Focus solely on facts. Ask, "What do I actually know? What do I need to find out?"

**Red Hat (Feelings):** Then talk about feelings. Ask, "How do I feel about this?"

**Black Hat (Careful Thinking):** Be cautious. Ask, "What could go wrong? What do I need to be aware of?"

**Yellow Hat (Positive Thinking):** Look on the positive side. Ask, "What's positive about this?"

**Green Hat (Creative Thinking):** Create new ideas. Ask, "What other ways can I look at this?"

**Blue Hat (Planning):** Get organized. Finally ask, "What action should I take next?"

### Six Thinking Hats – De Bono Group

### Six Thinking Hats Technique - Improve Your Thinking — BiteSize Learning

### Six Thinking Hats® - Looking at a Decision in Different Ways