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Critical Thinking

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If you google “[top skills colleges want](#),” or “[top skills businesses want](#),” you will find that there are many lists of skills by many different authors. One skill that appears on many sites is critical thinking/problem solving. Critical thinking is clearly important and heavily emphasized; therefore, the question of what critical thinking is and how to best develop it is worthy of discussion.

Critical thinking is not something new; it dates to the beginnings of the church. Acts 17:2 states, “And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures,” (ESV <https://biblehub.com/acts/17-2.htm>). The phrase “he reasoned” comes from the Greek word “*dialogomai*” which means to get a conclusion across by exchanging thoughts (<https://biblehub.com/greek/1256.htm>), and it occurs 13 times in the New Testament. In this context, it is a process of giving and receiving information to reach a deeper understanding of God’s Word and His will.

According to the Foundation for Critical Thinking, “Critical thinking is the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skillfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating

information gathered from, or generated by, observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action” (<https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/defining-critical-thinking/766>). Critical thinking requires thought in order to analyze information gathered from many sources in order to make a decision. Critical thinking is not simply regurgitation of facts or prior knowledge but using those to make an informed decision that can be supported by the facts and knowledge.



To develop and increase critical thinking skills, one must practice. From lower school on, teachers at Prince Avenue Christian School emphasize developing these skills in many ways. Teachers are given tools to help develop critical thinking questions in assessments, and there is an expectation that these types of questions are on most assessments. Some teachers utilize [Harkness discussions](#) that require students to come prepared to discuss a specific passage from the textbook and support or defend their position. Hands on learning experiences, such as labs in science classes, require students to find the relationships between concepts and draw their own conclusions. We also provide Advanced Placement (AP) and dual enrollment courses, both of which have college level content and assessments. These are just a few examples of the things we do to develop critical thinking.

As our mission statement states, we “partner with Christian families . . .” There are also ways you, as our partner in education, can help your child develop critical thinking skills.

1. Ask “How?” and “Why?” questions when talking to your child about what he or she is learning in school: don’t stop with “What did you learn?” Ask questions that require your child to think



more deeply. Questions such as, “Why is that important?” or “How is topic A different than topic B?” allow your child to go beyond just facts and surface level knowledge and provide opportunities for critical thinking. These types of dialogues also allow them to practice answering questions in a safe environment. The answers require some risk in drawing conclusions from knowledge. Allowing your child to “practice” with you will build their confidence to answer those in class.

2. Ask, “How do you know this?” This requires students to build on previous knowledge and build support for their statements and ideas.
3. Ask them to look at situations from different perspectives. Ask questions such as “How does this problem affect you?” “How does it affect your parents?” or “How does this affect people in the neighborhood?”. All of these questions will require your child to think about others and their concerns and teach them to view problems from various perspectives, which often leads to creative solutions.
4. Finally, ask them ways to solve the problem or part of the problem. Allow your child to take the knowledge they have about a situation and develop potential solutions. Be sure their solution addresses multiple aspects of the problem and includes potential problems with solutions.

Until critical thinking skills are developed, many students see critical thinking questions as “hard.” They are difficult, but they can be made easier by developing those skills. Parents can help their children by taking the above approach to help each child increase his/her critical thinking skills and gain confidence in his/her abilities. It can start at an early age with simple problems such as cleaning their room or picking up toys and can grow in complexity with the child as he/she matures.

Critical thinking skills are an important part of not only education but also in life. I encourage you to help your child develop these thinking skills more fully.