Critical Thinking  
Assessing Your Own Work

Critical thinking consists of “thinking about your thinking” while you're thinking in order to make your thinking better. In other words, it is thinking which assesses and improves itself continually.

To continually improve your own thinking it is essential that you continually ask yourself the following questions:

♦ What precisely am I trying to accomplish?

♦ How can I determine whether or to what extent I am accomplishing it?

♦ What is the precise question I am trying to answer? What exactly must I do to settle this question or develop, at least, a rationally defensible answer to it?

♦ What information do I need? How can I get that information? Do I have the requisite facts and/or experience to support one answer rather than another?

♦ Do I have to look at my subject from more than one point of view? Am I clear about the point of view within which I am reasoning?

♦ What am I taking for granted (assuming)? Am I justified in making these assumptions?

♦ Where is my reasoning going? What are the implications of what I have said?

♦ What concepts or ideas are prominent in my thinking? Do I need to re-think any of these ideas?

♦ How clear and precise are my uses of words? Am I saying what I mean? Am I meaning what I say? Am I saying more than I know? Do I really know what I have said?

♦ Am I addressing the question or issue at a superficial or a deep level? Is it necessary that I address it at a deeper level?

These are some of the most important questions to ask yourself. Taking them seriously is to take seriously the extent to which your thinking is clear, precise, accurate, well-grounded in empirical fact, well-reasoned, relevant, logical, consistent, wide (rather than narrow) and deep (rather than shallow). You will not internalize these intellectual standards overnight, but the sooner you begin the farther you will get.