CAMBRIDGE

Critical Thinking

Introductory guide for teachers and educational managers

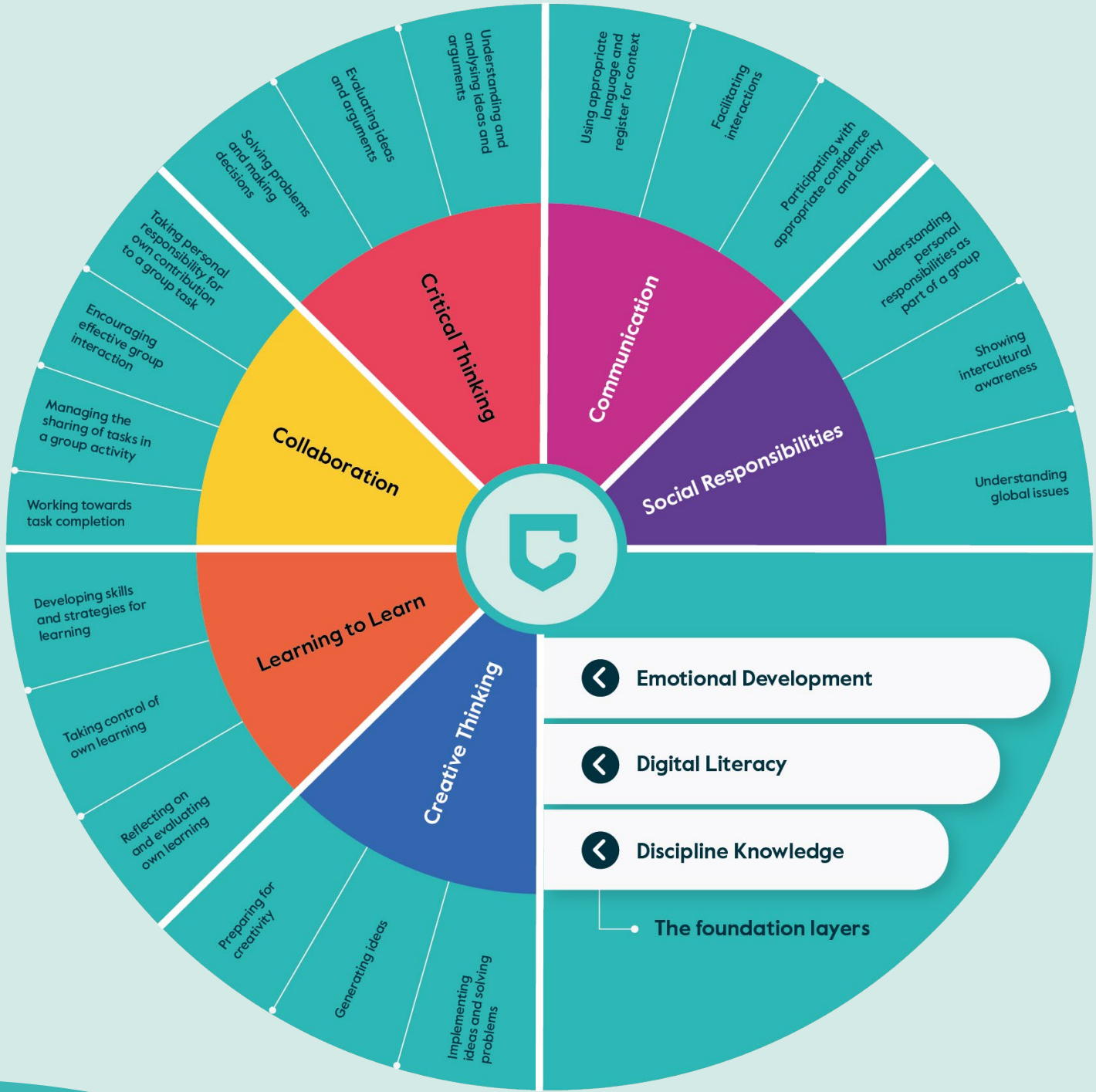
Cambridge Life Competencies

Why teach Life Competencies?

Our world is changing fast, and we need to prepare our students with skills and experiences that go beyond simply learning an additional language.

We see the increasing need to work together with people from around the world, to think creatively and solve problems, to analyse sources more critically, to communicate our views effectively, and to maintain a positive mindset in an increasingly complex world.

We understand that the engaging and collaborative nature of the language classroom is the perfect place to develop and embed these key qualities and the Life Competencies framework supports teachers in this challenging area.



What is the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework?

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework has been created in response to educators who have asked for a way to understand how life skills, or 21st century skills, can be integrated into English language programmes. It is made up of six **Competencies** that describe how these essential skills develop and vary across different stages of education, as learners grow and change.

Creative Thinking	Learners actively participate in creative activities, generate new ideas and use them to solve problems.
Learning to Learn	Learners develop practical skills to support and take control of their learning and reflect on their own progress.
Collaboration	Learners work well together in groups through actively taking part in group activities, listening to others, sharing tasks and finding solutions to problems.
Critical Thinking	Learners identify patterns and relationships, evaluate ideas and use these skills to solve problems.
Communication	Learners choose the most appropriate language to use in different situations, manage conversations effectively and express themselves clearly and confidently.
Social Responsibilities	Learners recognise and describe different roles and responsibilities in a variety of groups and understand cultural and global issues.

In addition, there are three **Foundation layers**. Foundation layers are not separate competencies. Instead, they act as underlying dimensions that support and strengthen every other competency. They provide the essential capacities that allow learners to develop and apply all other life competencies effectively.

Emotional Development	Learners identify and understand emotions, manage their own emotions as well as develop empathy and relationship skills.
Digital Literacy	Learners create content, share and interact with others online and maintain their safety and wellbeing while using technology.
Discipline Knowledge	Learners' knowledge of the English language, as well as of other subjects, supports and strengthens their competency development.

The learning journey

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework supports learners at all stages of their learning journey, from very young pre-primary learners right through to adults in education and at work. The framework maps out how learner behaviours typically found within each competency can change and develop as learners encounter new situations and circumstances in their lives both within and beyond the classroom.

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework allows us to support learners throughout their education and into the careers of the future.

- Pre-Primary
- Primary
- Secondary
- Higher Education
- At Work

How the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework aligns with key themes in ELT

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework consists of competencies that are strongly related to key themes in ELT such as:

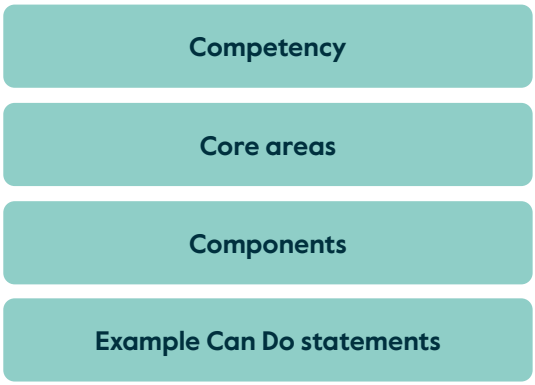
- AI Literacy
- Global Citizenship
- Mediation and Translanguaging
- Oracy
- Sustainability
- Wellbeing

By developing the competencies in the framework, learners are also developing much of the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to develop in the above areas.

This booklet will outline how the Critical Thinking competency aligns with these themes. To find out more about any of the themes, see our series of mini booklets .

Understanding the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework

The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework is made up of six **Competencies** – **Creative Thinking**, **Critical Thinking**, **Learning to Learn**, **Communication**, **Collaboration** and **Social Responsibilities**. Each broad competency is broken down into **Core areas** that describe these competencies in more detail. These are then analysed further into **Components** that, along with example **Can Do statements**, describe the observable behaviours that learners are likely to be able to demonstrate by the end of each stage of learning if they have had the opportunity to develop in these areas.



Linked to the competencies are the three foundation layers of the framework – **Emotional Development**, **Digital Literacy** and **Discipline Knowledge**. Development of skills in these foundation layers underpins all other competencies.

Along with this structured breakdown, we provide **example language** that learners may use to express the actions and behaviours found in each of the Core areas at each stage of learning. These have been informed by both our Functional Language Phrase Bank, a collection of spoken data from expert speakers of English from children to adults, and input from experienced ELT practitioners from around the world. See this example for one Core area within Critical Thinking at the Primary stage:

Competency	Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Critical Thinking	Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments	Identifying and classifying information	Identifies characters, setting, plot and themes in a story.	It's about [a man] ...
		Recognising patterns and relationships	Compares different types of information (e.g. looking for similarities and differences).	In the first [picture/box], there's ...
		Interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data	Explains why things happened (e.g. identifying cause and effect in a story).	He was angry because ...

By clearly defining these areas of development in a structured and detailed way, we can ensure that our teaching and learning materials take a systematic approach to delivering and developing these skills in our learners, as they progress. This means that teachers can be assured that our resources bring out the best in their students, without creating extra work.

It should be noted that the framework was developed primarily from research and frameworks that centred neurotypical expressions of Competencies, as neurodiversity and neurodivergence were less well understood when the framework was first created. Users of the framework should therefore adapt the framework flexibly, recognising that learners may demonstrate Competencies in diverse ways beyond those described in the framework. Further guidance on this will be published in due course.

What is Critical Thinking?

Critical thinking refers to higher levels of thinking that learners need to enable them to think effectively and rationally about what they want to do and what they believe is the best action. Thinking critically is effortful (Halpern, 2014) and consists of skills such as identifying links between ideas, analysing and evaluating arguments and undertaking reasoning in order to come to appropriate conclusions.

We have identified three **Core areas** within Critical Thinking:

Critical Thinking	Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments
	Evaluating ideas and arguments
	Solving problems and making decisions

- **Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments** refers to a learner's ability to identify and analyse information in order to recognise patterns and relationships. This helps students to gain a deeper understanding of ideas and arguments as well as to interpret and draw inferences about the information they are presented with.
- **Evaluating ideas and arguments** is related to a learner's ability to judge which arguments or ideas they can rely on and which they should be sceptical about. This includes evaluating evidence presented in an argument as well as the argument's overall logic. Mastering this competency helps learners draw appropriate conclusions and construct strong arguments themselves.
- **Solving problems and making decisions** involves many skills such as identifying and analysing problems, gathering appropriate information, evaluating a range of options, making decisions about which options to implement and finally, evaluating those decisions to further refine solutions.

Within these Core areas we break things down further, defining the components that make up each Core area:

Critical Thinking	Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments	Identifying and classifying information
		Recognising patterns and relationships
		Interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data
	Evaluating ideas and arguments	Evaluating specific information or points in an argument
		Evaluating arguments as a whole
		Drawing appropriate conclusions
	Solving problems and making decisions	Identifying and understanding problems
		Identifying, gathering and organising relevant information
		Evaluating options and recommendations to come to a decision
		Justifying decisions and solutions
		Evaluating the effectiveness of implemented solutions

How does Critical Thinking align with key themes in ELT?

Critical Thinking skills support the development of the following key themes in ELT:

AI literacy: Effective and responsible use of AI requires critical thinking skills such as evaluation of AI-generated outputs.

Global citizenship: Thinking skills including critical thinking, systems thinking and futures thinking help learners understand, analyse and evaluate complex information about global issues.

Mediation and translanguaging: Analysing and evaluating information across languages can support Critical Thinking. The processes involved in simplifying complex information and explaining visual data also requires the use of Critical Thinking skills.

Oracy: These skills help learners evaluate the points others present as well as their own ideas. They also help them justify their own arguments effectively.

Sustainability: Strong Critical Thinking skills allow learners to evaluate information on sustainability topics, analyse data and make informed decisions.

Wellbeing: Using critical thinking to work through challenges can support coping skills and emotional regulation.

See our series of mini booklets on these themes to find out more.

Spotlight on Global citizenship

Global citizenship refers to "a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It emphasises political, economic, social and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, the national and the global." (UNESCO, 2015, p14). By critically evaluating information, questioning assumptions, and weighing evidence from diverse sources, learners not only strengthen their reasoning skills but also develop the capacity to participate responsibly in a connected and interdependent world.

Global citizenship nurtures critical thinking because it requires learners to explore complex and often ambiguous issues, identify bias, and balance differing viewpoints. In doing so, they learn to evaluate the reliability of information, construct well-founded arguments, and make ethical judgments that consider local and global implications.

Global citizenship skills align particularly well with **interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data, evaluating specific information or points in an argument, evaluating arguments as a whole, evaluating options and recommendations,** and **justifying decisions and solutions components** of **critical thinking.**

We have highlighted some of the **Example Can Do statements** from these areas of the framework that could be used to support Global citizenship. Look out for the following icon in the following pages:

To find out more about how the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework aligns with Global citizenship and can support the development of these skills, see our mini booklet.

Critical Thinking across the learning journey

Core areas may be realised in different ways across the different stages of learning. In order to demonstrate this, each **Core area** and **Component** is contextualised by an example **Can Do statement**. This illustrates what kinds of behaviour students who are competent in this area might display by the end of each stage of learning. These example Can Do statements can be used as a starting point in the development of a curriculum, programme or assessment system and will vary in their suitability for learners in different contexts. The example language is provided for teachers to consider what kind of language they could encourage their students to use in these kinds of tasks.

Pre-primary

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments	Identifying and classifying information	Sorts, arranges and describes objects by shape, size, colour, weight, texture and position.	It's a [square/circle/triangle].
	Recognising patterns and relationships	Matches objects, people, letters, pronunciations and words.	They're [comparative adjective].
	Interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data	Draws simple inferences about fairness or care from pictures or stories (e.g. guesses from a picture of children sharing toys that they are being kind).	They are right/wrong
Evaluating ideas and arguments	Evaluating specific information or points in an argument	Decides whether an action in a story is kind or unkind.	That was nice/not nice
	Evaluating arguments as a whole	Identifies whether a text is factual or fictional.	That's [real/not real].
	Drawing appropriate conclusions	Chooses which 'point of view' they agree with most.	I agree with ... because ...
Solving problems and making decisions	Identifying and understanding problems	Identifies characters' problems in stories.	It's not working!
	Identifying, gathering and organising relevant information	Identifies some options for solving a problem.	He/she can [verb].
	Evaluating options and recommendations to come to a decision	Explains what is good and bad about different options.	It's good because ...
	Justifying decisions and solutions	Explains why they have chosen a particular option.	Because ...
	Evaluating the effectiveness of implemented solutions	Explains whether a solution is working or not.	It doesn't work because ...

Primary

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments	Identifying and classifying information	Identifies characters, setting, plot and themes in a story.	It's about [a man] ...
	Recognising patterns and relationships	Compares different types of information (e.g. looking for similarities and differences).	In the first [picture/box], there's ...
	Interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data	Explains why things happened (e.g. identifying cause and effect in a story).	He was angry because ...
Evaluating ideas and arguments	Evaluating specific information or points in an argument	Judges whether something is true or not and gives a reason.	I don't think so.
	Evaluating arguments as a whole	Explains why they believe or don't believe what a character says in a story.	[He]'s telling a lie because ...
	Drawing appropriate conclusions	Suggests possible reasons for problems described in a text.	Maybe ... ?
Solving problems and making decisions	Identifying and understanding problems	Describes problems in a situation given in a story (factual or fictional).	There aren't any ...
	Identifying, gathering and organising relevant information	Identifies potential solutions to a real-world problem (e.g. reducing pollution).	[We] could ...
	Evaluating options and recommendations to come to a decision	Describes consequences of different potential actions of characters in a story.	If [he] ... , [he] will ...
	Justifying decisions and solutions	Articulates preferences and can justify their choices.	I prefer ... because ...
	Evaluating the effectiveness of implemented solutions	Makes predictions and estimations from given information.	This plant will grow faster than the others.

Secondary

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments	Identifying and classifying information	Identifies the basic structure of an argument.	This is the conclusion.
	Recognising patterns and relationships	Compares points and arguments from different sources.	Here ... but there ...
	Interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data	Identifies assumptions and inferences in an argument.	[She] really thinks ...
Evaluating ideas and arguments	Evaluating specific information or points in an argument	Identifies evidence and its reliability.	How can you prove it?
	Evaluating arguments as a whole	Gives reasons for an argument's plausibility.	I think it's true because ...
	Drawing appropriate conclusions	Selects key points from diverse sources to create a new account and/or argument.	In summary ...
Solving problems and making decisions	Identifying and understanding problems	Identifies problems in a proposed plan (e.g. to organise an event at school).	It's fine in theory, but ...
	Identifying, gathering and organising relevant information	Gathers information from reputable sources to understand different perspectives on an issue.	I did some research on [website].
	Evaluating options and recommendations to come to a decision	Examines possible solutions to a given problem and states how effective they are.	The problem with [x] is that ...
	Justifying decisions and solutions	Presents justification for a particular solution in a well-structured report.	There are three main reasons for ...
	Evaluating the effectiveness of implemented solutions	Considers which elements of the solution have worked well and which have not.	[x] went well because ...

Higher education

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments	Identifying and classifying information	Identifies the key points in an argument.	The main point is ...
	Recognising patterns and relationships	Contrasts different points of view on a specific topic.	If you look at it like this ...
	Interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data	Identifies unstated assumptions and biases in an argument.	That's a generalisation.
Evaluating ideas and arguments	Evaluating specific information or points in an argument	Checks clarity, relevance and fairness of different arguments and points of view.	I don't think that point is relevant.
	Evaluating arguments as a whole	Recognises basic weaknesses in argumentation.	That doesn't make sense.
	Drawing appropriate conclusions	Arrives at nuanced evaluations of ideas and arguments.	Taking [x] into account ...
Solving problems and making decisions	Identifying and understanding problems	Identifies problems to be addressed in a project relating to their area of study.	If [x happens], then [y won't].
	Identifying, gathering and organising relevant information	Gathers data or information in a systematic way in order to conduct a robust analysis and evaluation.	I've been using [x] to keep track of the articles I have been reading.
	Evaluating options and recommendations to come to a decision	Produces a systematic evaluation of different possible solutions.	It doesn't meet our criteria.
	Justifying decisions and solutions	Selects best options from a range of proposed procedures and justifies choices.	I chose [this] because ...
	Evaluating the effectiveness of implemented solutions	Identifies areas in which to improve an implemented solution.	Next time, we could ...

At work

Core areas	Components	Example Can Do statements	Example language
Understanding and analysing ideas and arguments	Identifying and classifying information	Summarises key points from business-related documents and presentations.	The key point is ...
	Recognising patterns and relationships	Identifies patterns in business and operational data.	[Sales] are going down/ increasing.
	Interpreting and drawing inferences from arguments and data	Identifies assumptions underlying a speaker's or writer's argument (e.g. in a business proposal).	To me, that suggests ...
Evaluating ideas and arguments	Evaluating specific information or points in an argument	Evaluates the plausibility of explanations in an argument, report or proposal, e.g. the weight of evidence.	But surely ... ?
	Evaluating arguments as a whole	Judges the strength of an argument, report or proposal (e.g. its significance and coherence).	This argument lacks ...
	Drawing appropriate conclusions	Arrives at nuanced evaluations of ideas and arguments.	Taking [x] into account ...
Solving problems and making decisions	Identifying and understanding problems	Describes problems to be addressed in relation to specific work issues (e.g. products, services, internal systems, working practices).	There should be ... but ...
	Identifying, gathering and organising relevant information	Identifies and accesses appropriate sources of knowledge and expertise in pursuit of solutions to problems.	According to ...
	Evaluating options and recommendations to come to a decision	Evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of a particular proposal.	The problem with [x] is ...
	Justifying decisions and solutions	Selects an appropriate solution to a problem and justifies their choice.	This might work if we ...
	Evaluating the effectiveness of implemented solutions	Identifies areas in which to improve an implemented solution.	Next time, we could ...

Critical Thinking in the classroom

The English language classroom is a supportive environment in which learners have the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills. It already offers many opportunities to develop critical thinking skills, for example through reading and listening comprehension activities, and the careful construction of written texts or presentations examining different sides of an argument.

As the demand for critical thinking skills in universities and the workplace increases, the English language classroom should seek to build on this background and ensure that this competency is embedded within the curriculum. These skills have not only an instrumental value (for example, in helping learners do well in standardised English assessment tests such as IELTS), but also a social value, with learners developing increased awareness and empathy by noticing, understanding and managing different points of view. Moreover, a second language can provide a safe space for learners to explore ideas they may not have thought about before. Indeed, some learners who may be unwilling or afraid of expressing an idea in their own language may be more willing to do this in a second language.

Critical thinking is inherently linked to other competencies outlined in The Cambridge Life Competencies Framework. It encourages learners to consider different points of view and challenge their pre-conceptions, thus developing their creative thinking and ability to communicate and collaborate with others. It develops skills that will be vital for success in an unknown future, such as the ability to analyse options and make better decisions.

Suggestions for classroom practice

The ideas presented here are intended as a general indication of the types of activity that might develop this competency in the classroom, and are not a definitive list.

General suggestions

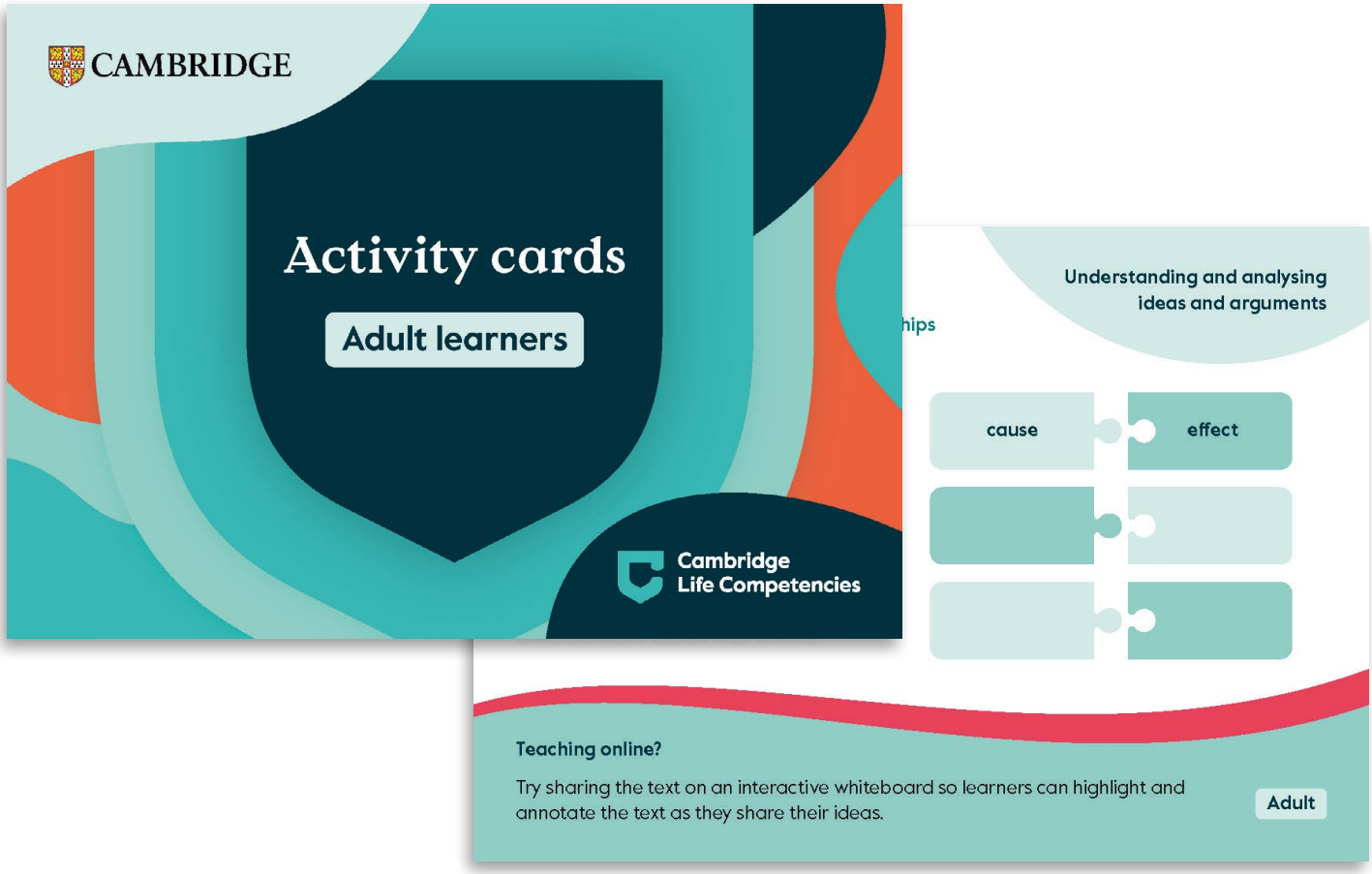
Regardless of the age of learners, at the heart of critical thinking is the notion of asking questions. Learners should be encouraged to continually question the information they receive and the conclusions they come to. The teacher should push learners to deeper critical thinking by asking them questions, such as:

- Why is that your answer?
- How did you come to that answer?
- Do you think there could be another answer?

Teachers should genuinely listen to learners when taking feedback and respond accordingly, by properly evaluating their ideas and arguments. In so doing, they show their learners that they too are critical thinkers (i.e. act as an effective model).

Activity cards

For more ideas on integrating the Critical Thinking Competencies into your classroom, see our Cambridge Life Competencies **activity card** packs. We've created a pack of cards for each stage of learning, and each individual card tackles a component from one of the core Cambridge Life Competencies. The activities are designed for you to use together with your coursebook or teaching materials, to tweak or supplement tasks. Go to **cambridge.org/clcf** to download your free pack.



Primary

Young learners are naturally curious. As such, it is crucial that learners do activities which actively encourage this curiosity. To this end, it is important to create an atmosphere in the classroom which encourages learners to think critically. Teachers must ensure learners really listen to each other during speaking activities so they can ask effective questions, and in doing so understand and analyse links between ideas.

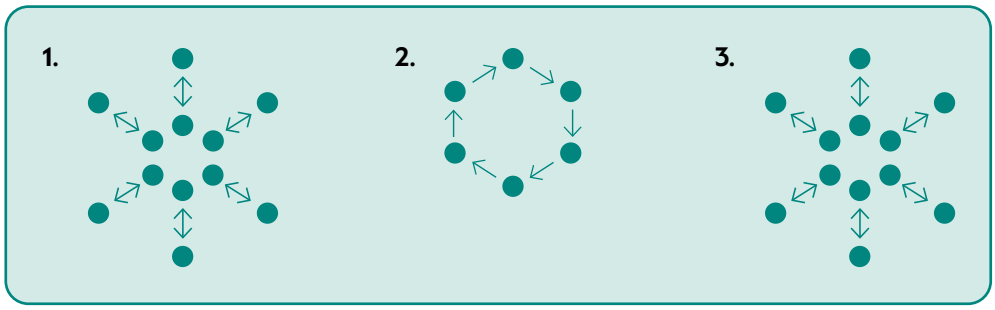
The following are some classroom activities and strategies that teachers can use to promote critical thinking development:

Translanguaging
When teaching speaking, teachers should consider using 'translanguaging', where learners can 'mix and match' their first language with the target language (i.e. English). This practice, which is common in many multilingual societies, can help manage the problems that occur when the content of an activity is too linguistically challenging, and help learners in better understanding and analysing links between ideas. This should be seen as an intermediary stage, prior to learners being able to do the task entirely in the target language.

Storybooks
Storybooks can be a useful resource when developing critical thinking skills with young learners. When teaching reading through storybooks, teachers can encourage prediction– for example, guessing what the story is going to be about from its title, or from the pictures. This process can continue throughout the story through dialogic reading practices, for example, asking learners questions at key points to prompt reflection and discussion.

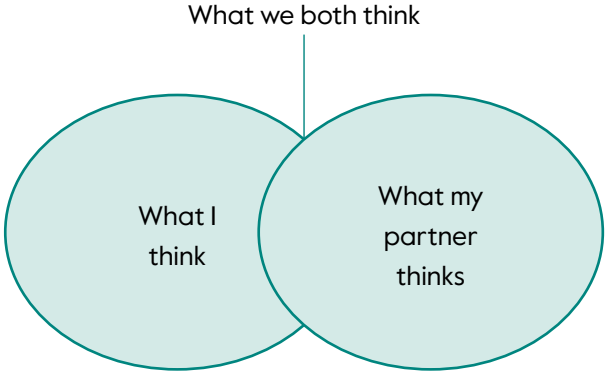
The doughnut method
After a task is a complete, learners feedback to others on what they have learnt. This activity encourages task repetition, so that learners deepen their knowledge on the topic. Learners follow these steps:

1. Learners form two rings facing each other – learners in the inner ring present their feedback to the learners opposite them;
2. After two minutes, learners in the outer ring move round to the right one place;
3. Learners in the outer ring then tell the learners opposite them what the previous learner said;
4. The process repeats itself several times.



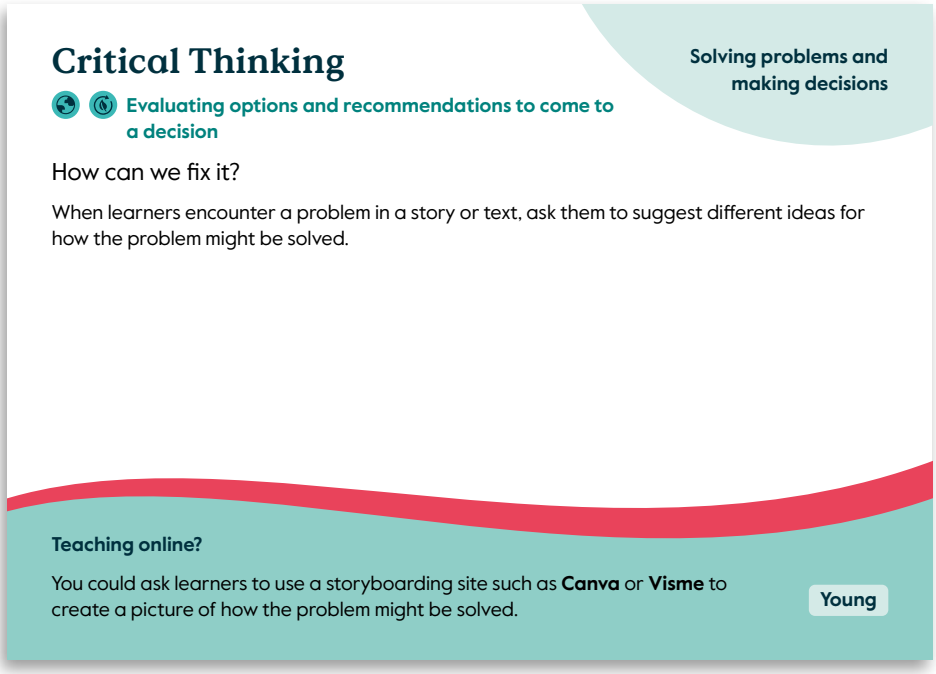
Visual organisers
These can be useful tools for learners to organise, evaluate and compare their thoughts and ideas. For example, a Venn diagram can be used to help learners to identify similarities and differences, as in the following example.

Compare your answers with your partner. Write your ideas in the left circle. Write your partner's ideas in the right circle. Then write things you agree on in the middle.



Activity card idea

Try out this activity from our Young Learners activity card pack (page 22). When learners encounter a problem in a story or text, ask them to suggest different ways the problem could be solved. This encourages them to think critically, explore alternatives, and evaluate simple solutions. To download this and other activity cards, go to **cambridge.org/clcf.**



Over to you ...

1. Choose one of the example activities in this section and try it out with your class.
   - When planning the activity, you may find the guidance in the 'General suggestions' section helpful.
   - Following the activity, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time, particularly focusing on the extent to which learners were able to develop their critical thinking skills.
2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could make these activities more effective in developing critical thinking skills.

Secondary

Learners at this age are motivated by topics and activities that are relevant to them or that interest them. It is therefore important to personalise the learning. Teachers should try to link course book material to learners' actual lives, or to their educational institution. If what they are learning in the classroom really means something to the learners, or if they are more familiar with the subject matter, they are far more likely to be able to understand the concepts and make links between ideas.

The following are some classroom activities and strategies that teachers can use to promote the development of critical thinking skills:

Flipping the learning
Learners may benefit from flipping the learning. Learners (especially higher-level learners) can be given more responsibility and opportunity to develop the core 'knowledge' outside of classroom time (e.g. for homework). This will help them to synthesise ideas and information. It will also mean that time in the classroom can be maximised for aspects of language acquisition which learners are less able to do by themselves, for example arguing, discussing, comparing, challenging and debating.

Exploiting productive activities
Productive activities (i.e. involving speaking and writing) are good opportunities to develop critical thinking. For example, when teaching writing, a teacher could set the same essay question for the whole class, then take the learners through the following steps:

1. Student A writes the first paragraph, and then passes it on to Student B.

2. Student B must read this paragraph and continue the writing.

3. After a few minutes, this is passed on to Student C, who continues the process.

Here is an example template that learners could use/fill in during a listening activity:

At every stage, learners are having to synthesise ideas and information as well as evaluate ideas, arguments and options. This can be a very effective and controlled method for developing writing, particularly for learners who are nervous about the idea of writing a long text by themselves.

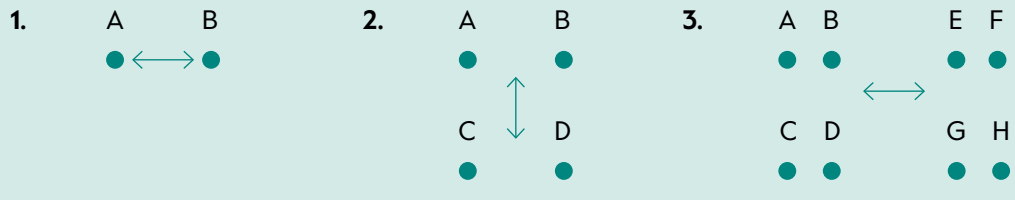
The snowball technique
This is an effective way to take feedback from a whole class and get learners listening to each other. This is usually done after an individual task in which learners have come up with their own answers. Then, after getting into pairs, learners follow these steps:

1. Students A and B compare their answers and agree on one they are both happy with.

2. Students A and B share their answers with C and D (and vice versa) and repeat step 1.

3. Step 1 repeats with the group size doubling each time, until it gets to the whole class level.

Snowball technique



Ranking and scales

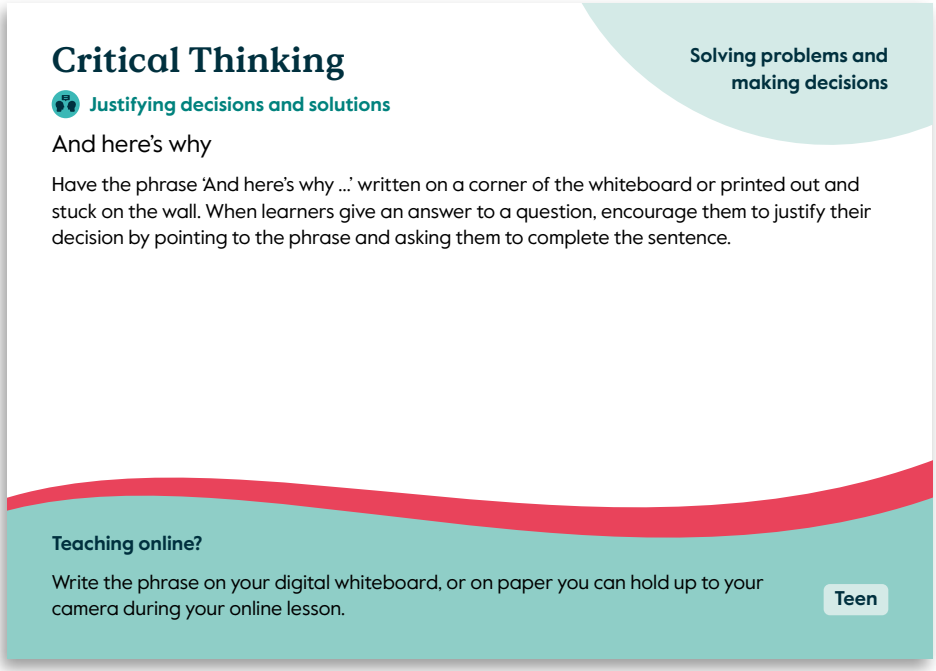
Scales, such as a Likert Scale, can be used to get learners to think more deeply about their attitudes and opinions, and compare their answers with others in a visual way, such as in the following activity:

Read the following statements. For each, write down the number which best represents your answer.

1	2	3	4
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

Activity card idea

Take a look at this activity from our Teenage Learners activity card pack (page 23). Write the phrase 'And here's why ... ' on the board or display it in the classroom. When learners give an answer, encourage them to complete the phrase to justify their choice. This builds reasoning skills and helps them explain their ideas clearly. To download this and other activity cards, go to **cambridge.org/clcf**.



Critical Thinking

Solving problems and making decisions

Justifying decisions and solutions

And here's why

Have the phrase 'And here's why ...' written on a corner of the whiteboard or printed out and stuck on the wall. When learners give an answer to a question, encourage them to justify their decision by pointing to the phrase and asking them to complete the sentence.

Teaching online?

Write the phrase on your digital whiteboard, or on paper you can hold up to your camera during your online lesson.

Teen

Over to you ...

1. Choose one of the example activities in this section and try it out with your class.
   - When planning the activity, you may find the guidance in the 'General suggestions' section helpful.
   - Following the activity, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time, particularly focusing on the extent to which learners were able to develop their critical thinking skills.
2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could make these activities more effective in developing critical thinking skills.

Adult

For adult learners, critical thinking is particularly relevant in academic and workplace contexts where they need to evaluate evidence, make reasoned decisions, and communicate ideas clearly. Adult learners are often motivated by practical application, so it is important to connect classroom activities to their professional, academic, or personal goals. Providing opportunities to question assumptions, analyse different perspectives, and apply learning to real-life situations helps them see the immediate value of developing their critical thinking skills.

The following are some classroom activities and strategies that teachers can use to promote the development of critical thinking skills:

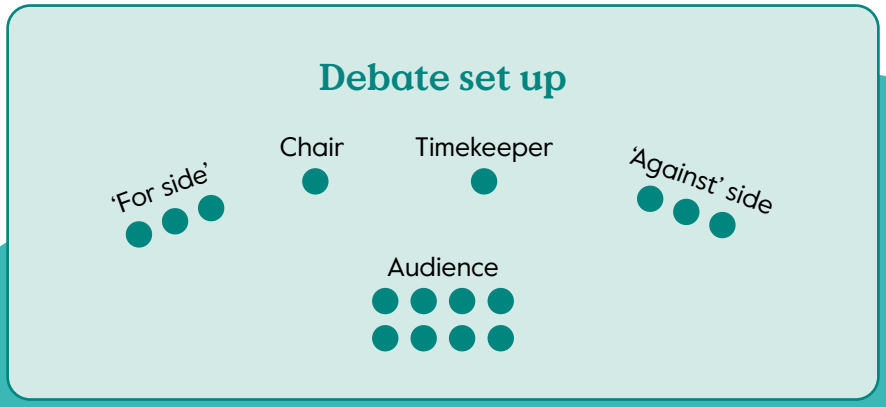
Diverse source material
In order to engage adult learners in critical thinking activities, teachers could provide them with opportunities to see issues from multiple perspectives. Teachers should provide source material (or get learners to find material) which provides rich, diverse, multi-faceted input, not just from one perspective, but from multiple perspectives. This will help learners develop the skill of evaluating ideas, arguments and options, as well as synthesising ideas and information.

It may be relevant to be more explicit when teaching critical thinking skills to adults. When learners have done an activity where critical thinking skills have been applied, teachers should talk about it and get learners to reflect on what they have done. When taking feedback, teachers should not only be asking for the correct answer, but how learners got to that particular answer.guidance regarding how to focus their searches by limiting the date, the resource type, and using appropriate key words relevant to the assignment in their searches.

Sustainable solutions challenge
In this activity, learners work in groups to solve a workplace or community sustainability problem (e.g. reducing plastic waste in the cafeteria, switching to fair trade coffee, or cutting energy use in their department). They first identify and define the problem, then review short input texts with facts and perspectives, brainstorm and evaluate possible solutions, and finally present and justify their chosen option.

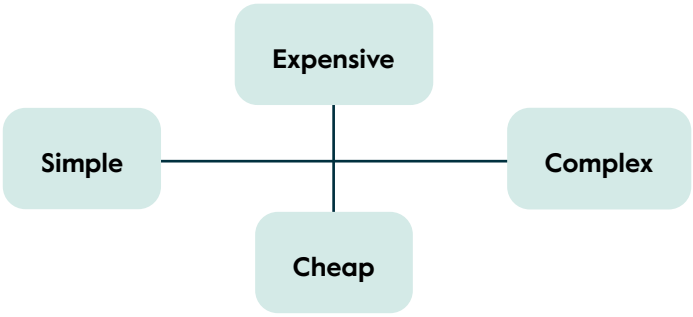
By mirroring real-world workplace and academic decision-making, the activity gives learners authentic practice in English for problem-solving and persuasion ("The main issue is … "/"We chose this because … "). It also encourages learners to engage with global citizenship themes such as sustainability, ethical responsibility, and community impact.

Class debates
Debates are an authentic way of getting learners to listen actively to their peers and consider arguments from different viewpoints in order to make informed decisions. Learners are divided into different roles, e.g. speaker, timekeeper, those debating 'for', those debating 'against', and the audience (who will ultimately vote on a result). Learners then debate a given topic. The classroom can be set up in the following way:



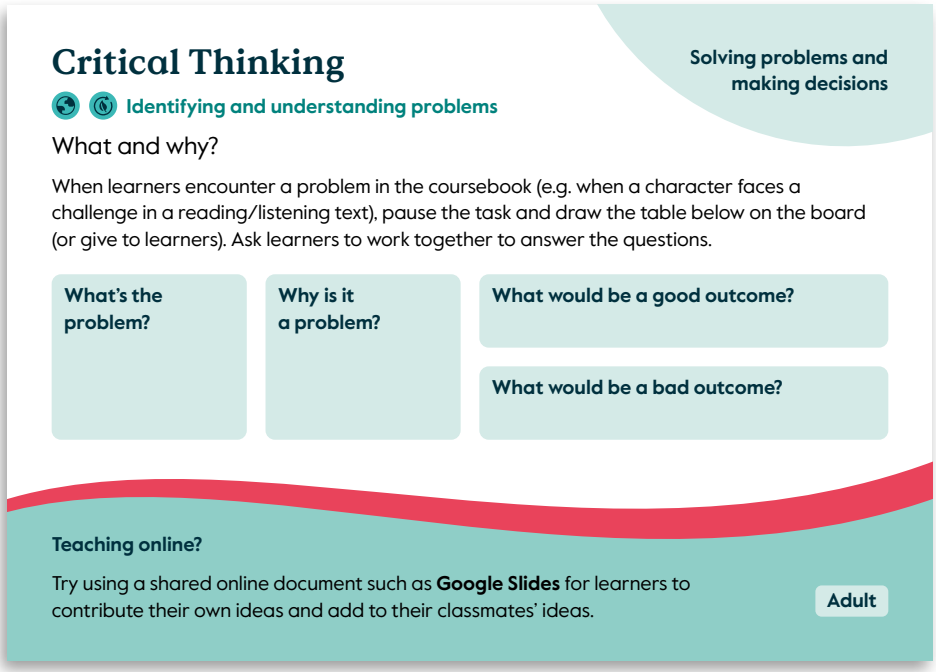
Visual diagrams

A diagram, such as a cross-diagram in the example below, can be used for learners to make more complex evaluations, e.g. the strengths and weaknesses of solutions to a particular problem.



Activity card idea

Why not try out this activity from our Adult Learners activity card pack (page 20)? When learners encounter a problem in a text or story, pause and ask them to analyse it using four key questions: What's the problem? Why is it a problem? What would be a good outcome? What would be a bad outcome? Learners work together to discuss and complete the task, developing their ability to identify, understand, and evaluate problems. To download this and other activity cards, go to **cambridge.org/clcf**.



Over to you ...

1. Choose one of the example strategies in this section and try it out with your class.
   - Following the implementation of the strategy, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time, particularly focusing on the extent to which learners were able to develop their Learning to Learn skills.
2. Using your course book or other materials, choose a few activities that you may be using in your classes in the next week or so. Consider how you could use these activities to develop your students' Learning to Learn skills.

Further reading

For more information on this topic, please see:

Aithal, V., & Silver, J. (2023, March 30). *Enhancing learners' critical thinking skills with AI-assisted technology*. World of Better Learning. https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2023/03/30/enhancing-learners-critical-thinking-skills-with-ai-assisted-technology/

Anderson, L. W., & Krathwohl, D. R. (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Longman.

Black, B. (2008). *Critical thinking – a definition and taxonomy for Cambridge Assessment: supporting validity arguments about critical thinking assessments administered by Cambridge Assessment*. Paper presented at 34th International Association of Educational Assessment Annual Conference, 9th September 2008, Cambridge.

Butterworth, J., Thwaites, J., & Thwaites, G. (2008). *Thinking skills*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think: a restatement of the relation of reflective thinking to the educative process*. Boston: DC Heath and Company.

Ennis R.H. (2015). Critical thinking: A streamlined conception. In M. Davies & R. Barnett (Eds.) *The Palgrave handbook of critical thinking in higher education*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Fisher, A. & Scriven, M. (1997). *Critical thinking: Its definition and assessment*. Norwich, UK: Centre for Research in Critical Thinking.

Fisher, A. (2011). *Critical thinking: An introduction* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Halpern, D. (2014). *Thought and Knowledge: An Introduction to Critical Thinking* (5th ed.). New York: Taylor and Francis.

Shiroma, M. (2022, September 7). *What critical thinking is and how it's taught*. World of Better Learning. https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2022/09/07/what-critical-thinking-is/

Shiroma, M. (2022, September 7). A *deep dive into critical thinking (part 2) – the bias battle*. World of Better Learning. https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2022/09/07/deep-dive-into-critical-thinking-bias-battle/

van Gelder, T. (2005). Teaching Critical Thinking: Some Lessons from Cognitive Science. *College Teaching*, 53(1), 41–46. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27559216

Willingham, D. T. (2019). *How to teach critical thinking* (Occasional Paper Series). New South Wales Department of Education. https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/teaching-and-learning/education-for-a-changing-world/media/documents/How-to-teach-critical-thinking-Willingham.pdf

Notes

Cambridge Life Competencies

You can find information about the other competencies and the foundation layers of the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework at **cambridge.org/clcf**

- Creative Thinking
- Critical Thinking
- Learning to Learn
- Collaboration
- Communication
- Social Responsibilities
- Emotional Development
- Digital Literacy

Find out more at
cambridge.org/english

We believe that English can unlock a lifetime of experiences and, together with teachers and our partners, we help people to learn and confidently prove their skills to the world.

Where your world grows

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS & ASSESSMENT

All details are correct at the time of going to print in April 2026.

BAUBRO/66397/0326