



# Critical Thinking

**You have probably heard your teachers talk a lot about critical thinking. It's important to understand what it is because it is essential to use critical thinking in any work you do in school.**

Here is how one organization, The Critical Thinking Consortium, has described critical thinking:

“The term critical thinking draws attention to the quality of thinking required to competently pose and solve problems, reach sound decisions, analyze issues, plan and conduct thoughtful inquiries and so on. In other words, thinking critically is a way of carrying out these thinking tasks just as being careful is a way of walking down the stairs.”

It has also been described as “thinking in the face of a set of criteria.” For example, was Sir John A. Macdonald Canada’s greatest prime minister? Well, what are the criteria on which we are judging? That is the question you must ask whenever you are evaluating something.

When writing or giving presentations, it will always be useful for you to make your thinking clear and visible to the teacher. How can you do that? Below are a few tips and things to think about that will help you.



Are there criteria to apply to your topic and to help you judge it? Make them known. You can make your own criteria too. In case of analyzing our sample question, “was Sir John A. Macdonald the best Prime Minister,” one of your criteria might be, “what did he accomplish that improved Canada?”

2

Have you explained your reason for thinking what you do? This is sometimes referred to as “analysis.” In our example about Sir John A., we might argue that Sir John A. Macdonald was Canada’s greatest prime minister because he united the country from sea to sea and helped create a continental railway to link it from coast to coast.

3

Have you made connections to other topics that are related? For example, have you made a connection between something that happened in the past and a current event? In the case of the railway Sir John A. helped build, we can note that it remains a very important mode of transportation in Canada.

4

Do you have enough knowledge and understanding of your topic to be able to make judgments? If not, perhaps a bit more research is needed. For example, it is impossible to decide whether Sir John A. was the best prime minister without researching other prime ministers and their accomplishments. Who else might be considered the best and why?

5

Can you rank the importance of the information you have? For example, what are the first, second and third most important things you know about your topic? Make that clear. It’s also a good foundation for the organization of any presentation you may be giving.

6

Can you do anything with your new-found knowledge? Can you make some conclusions of your own? This is different from saying what someone else has said about the topic. Critical thinking would be explaining why you agree or disagree with someone else’s conclusion. In the case of our question about Sir John A., we might conclude that while some historians have declared him the most important prime minister, he was in fact one of the most important prime ministers, or the most important prime minister of early Canada.

7

Can you make a comparison between your topic and something else? In the case of Sir John A., we might conclude that he was one of the greatest prime ministers, but Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who patriated the Canadian constitution in 1982, was also one of the most important prime ministers in history.

Applying this type of thinking will give your work greater insight and depth.