

Critical thinking

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



Critical Thinking When questioned on the importance of critical thinking and why nurses need to be able to critically think. I reviewed what critical thinking means. Webster's dictionary states that critical thinking is disciplined intellectual criticism that combines research, knowledge of historical context, and balanced judgment (Webster's, 2005). Reviewing several journals, newspaper articles and web sites the perfect definition was found from a public university " knowing what to believe or do" (Ennis, 1985) That definition sums it up, but there is much more to critical thinking than just what the definitions gives us. A required competency in the practice of nursing is critical thinking and critical thinking skills. It is very important to promote critical thinking in every clinical setting to be able to implement problem solving, decision making, and the ability to arrive at a conclusion regarding a patient's condition. Critical thinking is the disciplined, intellectual process of applying skillful reasoning as a guide to belief or action (Paul, Ennis & Norris 1989). Critical thinking is of high importance in the nursing field. It is also an essential clinical skill and an important complement to our profession. It is commonly linked to problem solving and finding better solutions or explanations for certain events. Making good decisions and sound judgment and assuming responsibility is a number one priority in nursing. Being able to look at a problem in different ways, work through it to come to a resolution. Apply the knowledge you have learned to figure out what your next step, is essential in critical thinking. In my opinion it is one of the most important skills a nurse can have. Being able to make judgment calls and prioritize any problem that comes up in various situations on a daily basis. By practicing those skills of assessing, gathering, comprehending, and

synthesizing all forms of information in order to solve a problem. The importance of critical thinking skills has even made its way to the National League for Nursing Accreditation Commission (NLNAC). They have a belief that nurses must have good critical thinking skills in order to make appropriate and valid clinical judgments in practice. They believed this so much they mandated that nursing programs educate nursing students to think critically as part of their requirement for accreditation. Although critical thinking skills have high importance there is no universally accepted definition of critical thinking for nursing, nor is there a universally accepted measurement tool to assess the critical thinking skills of nurses (Blondy 2007). Educators still continue to develop and use various teaching methods in an attempt to successfully teach nursing students to think critically (Blondy 2007). The expectation for nursing faculty to have good critical thinking skills exists even though there is little to no formal training in critical thinking. Critical thinking skills vary between individuals and these skills are dependent upon both cognitive and affective traits. Cognitive traits are developed as a result of education and experience. The ability to question and analyze your application of theory to practice and your evaluation of assumption and data are all examples of cognitive traits. Affective traits are part of one's individual personality and tendencies. A person being able to have an open mind and have confidence in their ability and awareness of personal bias, willingness to consider the opinions of others and being ready and willing to revise one's own opinion based on information obtained (Blondy 2007). While most theorists have supported a more general view of critical thinking (Ennis, 1988) which focuses on cognitive and affective traits

that a person possesses, they recognize that in order to reflect and make judgments about information, a person that is thinking critically must seek to fully understand the information put before him or her (Blondy 2007).

Studies have shown that there is a focus of critical thinking in nursing. In nursing you have to be able to problem solve, review data, make clinical decision and judgment when using the nursing process. There are several gaps in the nursing research information about critical thinking and its relationship to professional nursing competence. For example, does the expert nurse demonstrate a higher level of critical thinking ability than the beginner nurse? Does critical thinking ability increase or develop in relationship to education or professional experience? To date, these relationships have not been explored in the literature. It would be difficult to assume an individual could develop these expected competencies without critical thinking skills; to what degree, however, remains undetermined. As an intellectual skill, critical thinking does not occur in isolation; rather, it develops simultaneously with other recognized professional nursing competencies (Stark, Lowther, & Hagerty, 1986). It is essential that a nurse obtain and develop critical thinking skills. Having the skills will ensure their ability to provide effective and safe care regardless of the changing environment. It is a goal in most nursing organizations that they are able to teach these skills to their new nurses. Development of critical thinking skills is the ultimate goal that most facility and nurse educators would like to accomplish. Having the skills can help prepare the new nurse to be successful. Nurses are frequently involved in complex situations that demand high level problem solving and decision making. Because optimal

patient outcomes depend on clear and focused thinking, nurses must view themselves as thinkers and not simply doers (Baltimore 2004). Critical thinking is the key to resolving problems. Nurses who don't think critically become part of the problem (Baltimore 2004). Critical thinking requires familiarity with the concepts of good habits. Critical thinking entails purposeful, informed, results-oriented thinking that requires careful identification of problems, issues, and involved risks. It is based on principles of the nursing process and scientific method and is driven by patient, family, and community needs (Baltimore 2004). Health care is always changing and the type of clients and the nature of their care form the need for a nurse that is professionally prepared that is capable and competent to be able to reflect and critically think and has the competency necessary. The practice of medicine is highly advanced but if you possess the necessary skills and apply them to the care of your patient you add to the nursing practice.

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