

Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

CRITICAL THINKING: CHOICES & TOOLS

Knowing that we think is very different from knowing how we think.

The good student is a consciously thinking student. We can become aware of our thinking, learn about it, improve and control it. Wise thinkers match the effort with the importance of the choice; they:

1. identify the size of the problem or choice.
2. give the problem only as much attention as it deserves.

Three types of choices we make:

- Impulsive** how we make everyday choices, like deciding which cereal to eat.
- + valuable for minor decisions; this choice requires little time.
 - if used too often, we may fail to challenge ourselves, create additional problems, or turn too much of our lives over to other people.
- Habitual** based on acquired habits, like driving the same way to school, and sitting in the same seat in class.
- + establishes a routine requiring little thought; saves time.
 - no new discoveries; no challenges to outgrown tastes or interests.
- Systematic** needed for major decisions like buying a car, choosing a major, exploring careers; requires effort to pay attention and think carefully; less familiar type of choice than other two; seems harder, so we try to avoid using it.
- + carefully explores a range of possibilities to arrive at best choice; doesn't take a great deal of time, if using a conscious system.
 - requires careful attention and prediction of outcomes.

Thinking tools we use:

Patterns can be seen in all parts of our lives and are important to success in school, on the job, and getting along with people. In course work, we should recognize patterns in reading, writing and textbook concepts. We use patterns to organize paragraphs, essays and research papers, and to apply math and science formulas. Interpreting history, art and literature also is easier if we look for patterns.

Cause & Effect . . can be used to predict *what might occur* from a given action, to identify *what caused* a given action, and to figure out *how to cause* a future event to occur.

Test Possibilities . There are four steps to solving a problem:

1. Consider all alternatives to a solution.
2. Be clear about what you want; some solutions may be impractical.
3. Sort out alternatives compared to goals; then judge which are best.
4. Test all alternatives; which ones don't work? Which do? CHOOSE!

For more information, visit or call your nearest Rutgers Learning Center, or visit our website:<http://rlc.rutgers.edu>

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