A short guide to critical thinking - transcript

Students often tell us they find critical thinking to be confusing.

So what is critical thinking and how do you do it at university?

We think of critical thinking as asking and answering questions to help you make sense of something.

you probably do this every day without realising it but at university it may mean asking questions about something you've read or an assignment topic you are planning and starting to write.

We want to share some tips for thinking critically…

Plymouth University devised a great model to help generate critical thinking and it identifies three stages that can be applied to any aspect of your studies.

As an example we're going to apply the Plymouth critical thinking model to reading at university.

You can use the WHAT WHEN WHO and WHERE questions to better understand your topic or subject. This is the DESCRIPTION stage.

If you apply this to reading you may ask WHAT key points is the author making? WHEN was it written? WHO is the author and what is their expertise? Or WHERE was it published?

The questions WHY and HOW can help you to look a bit deeper into the topic or issue. This is the ANALYSIS stage.

You may ask WHY the author is making their arguments? HOW are the arguments constructed? For example does the author use a theoretical framework to enhance their assertions? HOW does the author support their claims? Do they provide evidence?

The three questions WHAT IF, SO WHAT, and WHAT NEXT can help you to come to your own conclusions and make judgements about what you've read. This is the EVALUATION stage.

By asking WHAT IF you may consider the limitations of what you've read. By asking SO WHAT you can question the significance of what you've read and by asking WHAT NEXT you can judge what you will do with the information.

This more detailed version of the Plymouth model suggests some other questions you can apply to your studies.

For more study skills support including guides and videos visit the Study skills Pages on the library website.