In a world where we are bombarded with information (much of which is not factually correct), employers are recognising that the ability to process, analyse and evaluate information is vitally important for many jobs. Critical thinking is the ability to evaluate and draw conclusions from information in order to make decisions and solve problems.

Someone with critical thinking skills can

- Understand the links between ideas
- Determine the importance and relevance of ideas and arguments
- Recognise, build and appraise arguments
- Identify inconsistencies and errors in reasoning
- Approach problems in a consistent and diplomatic way
- Reflect on the justification of their own beliefs and values

How can I develop critical thinking skills on my course?

- Research and write essays or reports where you are evaluating information from a number of different sources. Reflecting critically on material and formulating an opinion or writing persuasively about your views is an integral part of many academic programmes
- By analysing and drawing conclusions from data
- Through problem-solving in a research project
- By interrogating and deconstructing evidence and arguments from previous cases (law)
- By finding solutions to practical, creative or technical issues when working on a performance, presentation or digital project

How can I develop critical thinking skills outside my course?

- Re-consider everything you see, hear and read – are sources credible and reliable? Is there an alternative view? Take time to consider all view points.
- Be open-minded and be aware of your own bias – be open to challenging any subconscious ways of thinking as your appraise information.
- Research thoroughly and analyse information carefully to determine its reliability and relevance. Make sure you to understand it well enough to draw conclusions.
- Consider the consequences of your options in decision making (writing pros and cons is a simple way to start and doing a SWOT analysis is another useful technique).
You could do this via:

- Join a reading group or a debating group where you can participate in discussion around particular issues
- Reflecting on the approaches that you have taken in making decisions in every aspect of your life – when you evaluated your university options
- Taking an online course about critical thinking - platforms like Coursera, and FutureLearn offer free courses.

How do people use this skill in the workplace?

Royal Holloway graduates have used critical thinking skills as:

- A Lawyer critically evaluating evidence and formulating legal arguments
- Scientists, using critical thinking in research as they evaluate data and formulate conclusions and recommendations
- A Social Worker evaluating information from multiple sources to make decisions about the support needed by their clients
- Statisticians and Market Researchers, critically analysing data to collate information and identify trends
- UX Designers (User-Experience/Website designers) critically analysing users in their target market and then creating a strategy to meet their needs, and then use critical thinking to work with software developers to develop solutions

How will employers assess my critical thinking skills?

If you are applying for a role and the job descriptions states they are looking for someone who is a good analytical or critical thinking skills, make sure you can demonstrate this skill on your CV. You may also be asked specific questions on an application form or in an interview which are designed to assess your critical thinking skills. Examples of questions that could be asked include:

- Can you tell me how you approached and resolved a complex problem?
- Have you ever anticipated a problem before it arose? How did you deal with it?

You could also be asked hypothetical or mathematical questions that require you to demonstrate your critical thinking skills “in action” eg

- How many footballs will fit in a London bus?
- How many pairs of shoes does the average man in the UK buy each year?

If you’d like to get some help with structuring your answers for application forms or interviews, visit the CVs and interviews section of the Careers Moodle site.

ShortListMe, Graduates First and eCareersGrad are available on the Moodle page to help you practice interview skills, case studies and psychometric tests.

For more ideas on how you can ‘sell’ your skills on your CV then please watch our VIDEO CV workshop series, Part 3: Selling your ‘Skills’ on your CV (panopto.com)
In Assessment Centres or Interviews for some roles you could be asked to respond to a case study or problem – you could be given a case-study or business/technical issue and asked to respond with your thoughts and recommendations. Your critical thinking and problem-solving skills are one of the skills that are likely to be assessed. This is particularly common if you are being assessed for roles in Consulting and other commercial roles. Keep an eye out for the Assessment Centre workshops that run during the Autumn and Spring terms. These will be available to book via The Careers Portal.

You can make an appointment to speak with one of our Careers Consultants via the Careers Portal, where we can give feedback on your CV or application or help you to prepare for interviews and assessments, as well as help you think about your career options.