

# Critical Thinking and History

by Sophia Tutorial



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will focus on history and metacognition. Metacognition means thinking about thinking. History is an excellent subject for thinking about how we think. When you were young and learned about history, all that may have mattered was learning names and dates. As you grow older, you need to learn how to comprehend, apply, and analyse the lessons of history. If you are to be a fully critical thinker about history, you will also need to know how to synthesize and use the lessons of history. Only then can you really be a historian. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Critical Thinking and History
2. Bringing the WASP to New Heights
3. Steps for Critical Thinking
  - a. Knowledge
  - b. Comprehension
  - c. Application
  - d. Analysis
  - e. Synthesis
  - f. Take Action



## BEFORE YOU START

What's one decision you've recently made that required you to think carefully about information?

## 1. Critical Thinking and History

Critical thinking is an important part of how historians investigate the past. But what exactly is critical thinking? Simply put, it's thinking carefully about information in order to make a decision or solve a problem.[1]

This course will use a process to guide you through thinking critically about primary and secondary sources to answer historical questions. But critical thinking doesn't just help historians answer questions—it's a key part of using **problem solving** and making decisions in every area of life. Having a process to follow for a new skill like critical thinking helps you transfer that skill to other situations. If you're faced with a decision about a career change or a problem with child care, for example, you'll be able to call on the critical thinking process from this course. It will help you examine information and find the best solution or make the best decision possible.

## 2. Bringing the WASP to New Heights

Did you know that the way you think through a problem can help you soar towards your dreams? In this challenge's *Sophia Story*, you'll learn how decorated Thunderbird pilot Nicole Malachowski used critical thinking to achieve her long-held dream - the conferment of the Congressional Medal of Honor on WWII's Women Air Service Pilots.



### Skill Tip

Having strong critical thinking skills will make you a better and more informed problem solver. Critical thinking is focused on finding the facts and analyzing information without allowing emotions and assumptions to get in the way. By improving your critical thinking so you can solve problems in the present and future, you'll take a positive step towards achieving both your personal and professional goals!



### HINT

Critical thinking will be helpful as you examine your final project sources, and again as you use that information to answer your research question in your presentation. You'll start thinking critically in this challenge as you investigate historical questions and continue working on your assignment. Let's get started by walking through the steps of the process.

## 3. Steps for Critical Thinking

There are many different critical thinking processes. The one we'll be using has six steps and can be applied to anything from historical investigations to workplace problem solving (Elmansy, 2016). As we investigate historical questions in this course, we'll be focusing on the first five steps.



*Steps for Critical Thinking*



### Problem Solving: Skill in Action

Using critical thinking to solve problems outside of this course could help you, for example, propose a solution to address nursing mothers' rights at work, decide how to put a positive spin on an employment gap at a job interview, or even consider how skills you've learned in past Sophia courses have impacted your current success.

### 3a. Knowledge

The Knowledge step is about knowing what you need to do. As you investigate historical questions in this course, it's important to start the critical thinking process by thinking about the question itself. You may think this step is unnecessary, that you already know what you're trying to answer. But it's worth taking a few minutes to not only think about your question, but also to put it in your own words. Doing this helps you define what you're investigating from the start.

Once you've articulated your question, or put it into words, break it down into smaller pieces. Ask yourself questions like these:

- What are some more focused questions I can use to guide my investigation?
- What smaller pieces of information will I need to answer the bigger research question?

When you know what information you're trying to find before you start researching, you set yourself up for research success!

### 3b. Comprehension

In the Comprehension step, you work to understand your situation. You do this by first taking stock of what you know already and then using your sources to investigate your focused questions from the Knowledge step. Ask yourself questions like these:

- What do I know about this topic or issue so far?
- What information will help me build an answer to my questions?
- What information or evidence do I still need to find?

In this course, information will come from the primary and secondary sources for your topic. When you're trying to solve a problem or make a decision in another area of your life, you'll want to look for any information that will help you better understand your situation.

### 3c. Application

Once you've gained a better understanding of your problem or question, you'll use that understanding as you closely examine each of your sources in the Application step. Consider these questions:

- What is the historical context of each source? When and where was it written, and why?
- What similarities and differences do you see between your sources?
- Do your sources agree with each other, or do they offer opposing perspectives?

The knowledge you've gained from reading these lessons and your other secondary sources will help you place your primary sources in context. Thinking about your sources again after you've read them all will help you see connections and identify similarities and differences. As you compare your sources, you'll often be able to corroborate facts from one source by looking for similar evidence in another source.

### 3d. Analysis

After you've collected information and considered connections, similarities, and differences, it's time to think

more deeply with the Analysis step. This involves looking at your evidence and figuring out how it can help you make a convincing argument. You'll ask yourself questions like these:

- What are my stronger or more convincing pieces of evidence?
- What are my weaker pieces of evidence?
- What challenges am I facing in using this evidence to answer my research question?

### 3e. Synthesis

The Synthesis step is where you'll bring it all together. Based on the information you've collected and analyzed, you'll write down the answer that seems most convincing. You'll also support it with evidence or information from your sources. If you're using critical thinking to solve a problem, this step will help you make sure you're considering the circumstances, causes, and effects. If you're using critical thinking to answer a historical question—as you'll be doing for your assignments in this class—this step will help you ensure you're making a clear and convincing argument.

### 3f. Take Action

As you use critical thinking to learn from the past and prepare for the future, your last step is to take action—to take what you've learned and put it into practice. The same is true when you use this critical thinking process to make a decision or solve a problem in your life. After you've figured out your problem or issue, researched your options thoroughly, and brought your new information together to make a plan, you'll be ready to make your plan a reality.



#### HINT

Over the next few challenges, you'll practice these critical thinking steps as you dig into the history of civil rights in the United States. You'll also be building Touchstone 2 by applying these steps to your own final project research question.



#### SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about the relationship between **critical thinking and history**. Historians use critical thinking skills in many aspects of their work, as do many people in their everyday lives. You also saw how Thunderbird pilot Nicole Malachowski uses her problem solving skill to help female aviators get the recognition they deserve with the *Sophia Story* **Bringing the WASP to New Heights**. You also learned six **steps for critical thinking** that you will use in Touchstone 2. These steps include **Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis, and Take Action**.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: Strategic Education, Inc. 2020. Learn from the Past, Prepare for the Future.

### REFERENCES

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