



## **PRACTITIONERS SAY /**Making the most of university to develop critical thinking skills

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Throughout my professional life critical thinking has been an important asset, firstly when working in a financial company, and now in a research center (with a focus in work-life balance). My current role is to promote, in the private and public sector, organizational cultures that support work- family balance, flexible work environments, family friendly cultures, and professional advancement for women. We do this through research and through academic programs.

Critical thinking includes skills like observation, analysis, problem solving, communication, decision making, etc. It will allow you to empathize and be more receptive to others' points of views. The University is the best and most natural place to develop and to practice critical thinking, being a safe place to debate and discuss important issues. University is also quite unique in both the sheer number, and different types of, opportunities it presents: from the obvious places like in seminars, to the less-obvious environments such as the clubs and societies. It is a skill that will be very valuable both in your educational journey and later in your life, so my advice would be to make the most of these opportunities.

Critical thinking is always necessary and cherished, but If you work in education, research, finance or in management, then it is even more important. It will allow you to write, discuss, and produce without bias, to form your own opinions and to defend your point of view. For example, a manager will use critical thinking to evaluate financial data, or to review projects. In research, critical thinking is used to interpret and to reflect on data. In today's world, where there is always a lot of available

information, it is not the facts that you know that matter but how you work with them. The way you analyze them and the conclusions you arrive to. This is critical thinking, and it is what you should work on. It will be very important not only for your professional life, but for your personal and family life. University presents the perfect opportunity to develop and practice your critical thinking skills



### **PRACTITIONERS SAY** /The importance of asking the right questions

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Critical thinking is not a nice luxury to have; it's an essential skill in communications and issues management—the sector I work within. Whether you're developing brand strategy, stand-out campaigns or managing a crisis, the ability to challenge a brief, to problem-solve, and to think critically and independently is fundamental.

All too often a lack of critical thinking can present major communications issues down the line. Without challenging a brief or exploring different scenarios—how news might be interpreted, how social media might react, how sales might be affected, or the potential impact on corporate reputation—you could be ignoring, or, worse, heading straight towards, a potential problem once a project is underway.

Taking things at face value will allow you to get the task done, but not always deliver the best job. While I believe we should regularly ask of the brief *why, what for, who cares, why should we, how can we, why wouldn't we, what's stopping us*, we need to do that with skill, ability, professionalism, and judgment.

Developing critical thinking skills will allow you to identify which elements of the brief it is appropriate to question, as well as understand what is *not* in the brief, so you can ask any follow-up

questions before diving straight into the creative process. From what I've seen, those who take this approach create more focussed and creative campaigns.

As a result, individuals who can examine an issue and explore options creatively, collaboratively, and with an open mind are highly valued. The ability to think objectively is a key trait of truly trusted client advisors who successfully operate at C-suite level.