

CRITICAL THINKING

THE COST OF KNOWING WITHOUT THINKING



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Janus, the god of transitions, embodies the two directions of inquiry that correspond to the arts and the sciences. In the arts, students 'look back' in order to preserve the lessons of the past. In the sciences, students 'look forward' to the horizon of cutting-edge research in order to innovate and push the boundaries of what is possible.

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WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Critical thinking is the ability to evaluate information, question assumptions, detect bias, and make independent, reasoned judgments. It is a core academic skill and a foundational habit of the mind — vital for navigating complexity, resisting manipulation, and making sound decisions in an uncertain world.

In an era increasingly shaped by generative AI (GPT-4o, DeepSeek-R2) automation is quietly bypassing the intellectual struggle that once built resilience, discernment, and originality. The act of thinking is no longer slow, tentative, and self-directed; it is now fast, optimized, and algorithmically assisted. In the absence of critical thinking, automation erodes learning.

We believe that critical thinking is a mode of intellectual self-reliance. Our young people are living in an age of uncertainty and market volatility, they don't have time for passive instruction. Our seminar courses in critical thinking give students a strategic and lasting competitive advantage.

Whatever your prospective major, our critical thinking program is built to sharpen your skills and fortify your academic performance.

The students who invest in developing their capacity for critical thinking strengthen the very foundation upon which all other academic work is built.

Today's students are under pressure to perform — to move fast, chase the metrics, and earn the credential. In many cases, students graduate with qualifications but no clear purpose, no real sense of where they're going, or why. A meaningful career begins with a clear mind and an examined life. That's where we come in: our program empowers students to think clearly, choose deliberately, and to align their career paths with coherent values.

CRITICAL THINKING IN THE AGE OF AI?

The challenge facing today's students is clear: the more they rely on large language models like ChatGPT, the more their capacity for independent, critical thought begins to atrophy. Our seminar courses and online writing workshops directly confront this challenge.

In a culture that operates on the basis of instant answers, ignorance isn't a lack of knowledge — it's a lack of patience for the process of knowing.

Automation reorients attention outward. The learner no longer turns inward to wrestle with a concept or examine an idea; instead, they are trained to turn to the machine for immediate response. This shifts the locus of intellectual activity from the self to the system. As a result, the learning process becomes reactive — a matter of receiving, selecting, and remixing content rather than generating, questioning, and reconstructing understanding from within.

AI is here to stay. It's incumbent on us to understand what it can and can't do. The goal is not to compete with AI, not to submit to it, and not to haphazardly defer to it, but to develop the discernment, awareness, and integrity in order to thoughtfully engage with it in an equal partnership.

*Critical thinking is not something
you can download, it must be earned.*

We believe that critical thinking is a distinctively human capacity. There are no shortcuts here. Critical thinking must be earned through disciplined habits of the mind and nurtured in a learning environment that values constructive disagreement, fosters reflection, demands clarity in writing, and rewards the courage to question.

THE ONLINE WORKSHOP

The online workshop is designed to prepare students for a world in which intellectual discernment — not just digital literacy — will be the defining skill in the 21st century workplace. In this sense, our writing workshops do more than supplement academic instruction; they train students in the habits of mind necessary to thrive in an age of machine-assisted thinking.

For over a decade, we've worked to develop a curriculum that anticipates both the challenges and the unique opportunities presented by AI. The result is a world-class program delivered through a flexible hybrid model — combining synchronous & asynchronous learning. Our pre-recorded seminars — filmed on the campus of the University of British Columbia — are paired with weekly, live writing workshops led by TAs from Columbia University.

“Instead of penalizing AI-use, our online writing workshops provide individualized guidance, equipping each student with the ability to challenge its output, question its assumptions, and integrate their own insight and judgment.”

— Mr. Erfan Hakim (TA), Columbia University.

Our writing workshops are administered weekly by a qualified teaching assistant (TA). The workshops function as an adjunct to our weekly lectures, reinforcing core concepts through practice and discussion. The online workshops give students the time & space to dig deeper. Students learn to recognize the subtle shortcuts and cognitive biases that shape their thinking, critically interrogate the structure & reliability of AI-generated content, and to develop the intellectual autonomy necessary to make reasoned judgments.

Delegating cognitive effort to automation may seem practical, but it disables the mental habits — memory, synthesis, attentiveness — that define a truly educated mind.

Each online session is designed to build students' confidence not only as writers but as independent thinkers. AI is not treated as a shortcut but as a subject of scrutiny — a framework for deeper human inquiry. Through guided practice, students learn to treat AI outputs as the raw material for their own critical thinking. Students come to understand that GPT-4o and DeepSeek-R2 don't seek truth, they don't have human curiosity, they don't possess a conscience — they process patterns in data and compute probabilities.

Through participation in the online writing workshops, students become fluent in the principles of effective prompting, source triangulation, and the ethical dimensions of generative output — cultivating the necessary judgment to navigate machine-assisted writing with academic integrity.

Equally important, students will demonstrate the capacity to synthesize AI-generated suggestions with original insights, framing their work within coherent, evidence-based arguments. In short, they will be prepared not only to write more effectively, but to think more deliberately, to reason more rigorously, and to act more responsibly in the age of AI.

Let us not confuse technological power with intellectual progress.

Mr. Ivan Penkov.

Founder & Lecturer

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For
Young Leaders
at the Intersection
of Academic Life