

How SOCIAL SCIENTISTS use critical thinking?

Social science is about understanding how society works. Social scientists investigate why some human behaviors lead to preferred, productive outcomes and why others result in undesired, problematic, or even dangerous outcomes.

They search for the causes of outcomes to help us achieve the ones we prefer and control those we want to diminish or eliminate.



We can see social scientists use their critical thinking when they ask questions like these:

Think People - Who are the people involved?

Interpretation - Who are the people who will use this device?

Analysis - What personal characteristics are relevant for those people?

Analysis and Inference - What information about those people do we need to know?

Do the people work alone or as a group?

Evaluation - How is the group dynamic affected by changes in group membership?

Systematic Explanation - What characteristics of the person (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age, religious affiliation, socio-economic status, partner status, etc.) impact a person's behavior?

Fair-Minded Self-Regulation - If asked, would the person(s) involved in the event agree with our conclusions?



Think Situation – Think What? Where? and Why?



Interpretation - What's happening?

Truth-seeking Analysis - What were the reasons for his or her behavior (on the playground, at the office)?

Inference - What are the consequences of those actions (failing to pass the state budget, domestic violence)?

Systematic Evaluation - What are the costs, benefits, risks, and opportunities (of closing the homeless shelter in this community)?

Fair-minded Explanation - Why is this happening? What situational factors were the cause?

Foresightful Self-Regulation - What else do we need to know about these situations, ceremonies, and rituals before we can draw conclusions about their social meaning?

Think Actions - What are these people trying to achieve?

Systematic Analysis - Why did the person or group behave in the observed way?

Open-minded Interpretation—What meanings do those involved attach to these actions?

Inference - What are the consequences of one group's perceived needs on others?

Probability-Based Evaluation—How likely is it that these individuals or groups will act similarly in the future?

Explanation - Why do demands influence behaviors (political demonstrations change public opinion)?

Truth-Seeking Self-Regulation - How can we see definite changes in behavior (E.g., Juror opinions shifting when considering the new evidence)?



Think Motivation - Why are they taking these actions?

Interpretation—In this context, what was intended (by saying that, doing that)?

Analysis—What perceived gains or losses might this person be responding to?

Inference—What are some alternative factors that may have influenced his or her decision?

Truth-seeking Evaluation—Does our explanation fit the situation for these people? (their culture, economic situation, etc.)

Explanation—In the minds of these people, is their behavior justified, predictable, optimal, etc.?

Fair-Minded Self-Regulation—How can we maintain a fair and unbiased evaluation of this situation?

We've used both reasoning skills and thinking mindset terms to describe some of the characteristics of these questions.

