

If you apply the skills recommended in this abbreviated section, you will realize that much of what we've been exposed to is flawed. Flawed reporting or misrepresented data and misinterpreted results leads to inappropriate choices by the consumers of the 'news'.

ARE YOU TIRED OF BEING MISINFORMED? MISGUIDED? MISLED?

Behavioral psychologists know it takes repetition to create a habit. Most people have routines they follow regularly, and some habits that are on autopilot. Develop a routine that becomes a habit of using these

W questions to clarify the facts of what you hear, read, or see shared on social media or TV.

The core of a critical thinker is based on four simple questions.

The goal is to build the habit of politely asking simple questions to become a respectful skeptic:

SAYS WHO?

WHO? It is essential to know the real source of the information. Seldom is the talking head on the TV or the internet the source of the information being reported. If the talking head is the source, is it a claim of fact or an opinion, or an opinion of some other person, or a summary of a third source of data? Verifying the source is crucial to the next steps, determining the value of the information.

WHY SHOULD I CARE?

'WIFM' 'what's in it for me' is the heart of evaluating whether you should care about the information. It may be interesting, even thought-provoking. First determine how the information has potential to directly impact you, your loved ones, close friends, associates or neighbors, or not? If not don't waste a lot of precious time or energy on the issue. Move on. Life is short, focus on things that have potential to impact your life.

WHY SHOULD I BELIEVE YOU?

TRUSTWORTHY? You must determine the credibility of the source. What expertise or experience do they have to provide a valuable insight? What is their reputation? Has the source established a history of being reliable and trustworthy? How and where was the original information obtained? Was it from a 'person on the street' interview or a carefully controlled survey of a representative sample published in a respected journal with a reputation for accuracy?

WHERE'S THE PROOF?

CONFIRMATION. 'Trust but verify' is a time-honored tradition. Is there another trustworthy source that analyzed the data that came to the same conclusion? Are there any contrary conclusions based on the same data? Is there at least one other independent source of related data to support the claim?

Be confident that you are making choices based on valid information from trusted sources.

Become a respectful skeptic. Ask those four basic questions.

Your life will be better for it.

We are developing support materials at tomrowleybooks.com. If you are interested in improving your critical thinking skills and learning more about the rights and responsibilities of citizens, I invite you to visit our website.