

Film Guide

CRITICAL THINKING: MAKING SURE OF FACTS

11 minutes, color

We are constantly deluged with factual material, not only from textbooks, but also from TV, newspapers, and magazines. We use these facts in the classroom, political discussions, and/or everyday conversations. If we are to be successful in utilizing the information we receive, we must know how to identify and interpret facts. How can a person be sure about the facts? The answer is that we can't be sure; however, we can subject information to certain tests - tests applied by all people who exercise critical thinking.

Here are seven **important ideas** from the film:

1. "There was a sudden break in what he saw for himself. He ran out of facts and filled the gap with an **assumption** that turned out not to be fact. "
2. A **fact** is defined as "a thing done a deed - that which has existence -- the quality of being actual. "
3. An eyewitness is a **primary** source of information who was there. But an eyewitness account may or may not be factual. It depends on the skills of the witness. Did he/she actually see what was described? Or did prejudice color his/his description?
4. Anything other than an eyewitness account is a **secondary source**.
5. "When several statements appear together, and we know one is valid, we **should not** assume the other is valid, too. "
6. "The truth of the matter is that a statement of fact is a **statement of probability**."
7. "Because the earth is constantly changing, because the universe is changing, **facts themselves are changing**. That's why a person who effectively exercises critical thinking tries to keep aware of the facts. "

Related Questions and Activities

1. Why is it necessary to get the facts straight in everyday life?
2. What errors in critical thinking were made by the young man in the film who wanted to write his congressman about water pollution in his city?
3. If you read three newspapers which had differing accounts of the same incident, how would you decide which statements were the most reliable?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. How does a fact differ from an assumption.
2. What is the difference between a primary and a secondary source of information?
3. How do we find out which statements are really facts?
4. Do facts change? Explain your answer.