

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

60 minutes

Strand 2.1: Appreciating my Community

Participating

Outcome LCW.M2.S1.CPS.1

WHAT THIS LESSON DOES

This lesson helps you separate critical thinking, which means evaluating information and options, from problem-solving, which means taking action to resolve a situation. You will apply these to a personal decision you are facing and identify your next move.

CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Outcome	What the specification asks for
LCW.M2.S1.CPS.1	recognise the importance of critical thinking and problem-solving across a range of contexts.

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO

- Distinguish critical thinking as evaluating from problem-solving as acting
- Label your own recent moves on a real decision
- Name which of the two you are short of and the next move

KEY TERMS

Term	What it means here	For example
Critical thinking	Evaluating information, sources, options and risks before you commit to a course of action.	Checking a mock timetable against a work rota before deciding to cut shifts
Problem-solving	Acting to move a stuck situation forward: trying something, booking something, saying something, or changing a plan.	Asking a manager to swap three clashing shifts rather than only worrying about them
Decision	A real choice you face where more than one option is open and something will change depending on what you do.	Whether to keep Thursday evening work through mocks, drop hours, or leave the job

BEFORE THE BELL

- Confirm students can create or open a Module 2, Strand 1 folder in the Digital Portfolio and save a document titled Critical Thinking Summary.
- Have Aoife's note available on the board or screen as a scaffold for step 4 only.
- Remind the room of the difference in one line: evaluating is checking, comparing and questioning, while acting changes something in the world. Then circulate while they work and listen out for the borderline phrases, because those are the ones worth airing afterwards.
- On screen this lesson: card sort, document annotator, list builder.

Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

HOW THE LESSON RUNS		
5 min	introduction	Getting Started
10 min	activity	Evaluating or acting?
15 min	activity	Label the Moves
20 min	activity	Your Critical Thinking Summary
10 min	summary	What you covered

STEP BY STEP

5 min Getting Started

Open by asking for a show of hands on a live decision in the room: mocks versus shifts, subject choice, a job, a team commitment, a college or FET open day. Name that today's work uses *their* decision, not a textbook one. Keep this opening under five minutes, because the three activities that follow each need their full time and the writing in step 4 is the one that must not be rushed.

10 min Evaluating or acting? On screen: card sort

Let the class place every card on their own first, as a prediction, and do not show the model until most of them have committed to all eight. Pause after the second statement and invite one voice who agrees and one who disagrees, so the room hears that these are arguable. Watch for the common mix-up, which is treating any conversation as automatic action, or treating every check as though it had already solved the problem. Students who finish early can jot down the live decision they will write about later in the lesson.

15 min Label the Moves On screen: document annotator

WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

- Students who tag every research move as problem-solving
- Students who treat any spoken request as only interpersonal, and so miss that it is action
- A clean split on the swapped-shift trial, which is action that also produces new evidence

After they press Check, ask them: *Which tag felt hardest, and why?*

20 min Your Critical Thinking Summary On screen: list builder

FILE SETUP

If students do not yet have a Module 2, Strand 1 folder, have them create it now and add a document titled **Critical Thinking Summary**. Leave Aoife's case up on the board, but say plainly that it is there as a shape to copy, not a story to borrow, because each student needs to write from a decision that is genuinely theirs. If someone claims they have no live decision, prompt them with mocks, part-time hours, a team commitment, a family expectation, or a college or FET open day.

TIMING

Leave about 20 minutes clear in class for a solid draft, since this is the piece that goes into the portfolio. If anyone only reaches the decision, three moves and the shortfall, the dated next move can be finished at home before the next lesson.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Support: three labelled moves and the starters already on the page
- Stretch: add one move they have been avoiding and say why they have avoided it

As you circulate, note roughly how many named critical thinking as their shortfall and how many named problem-solving, because that split is what you will talk about in the closing discussion.

10 min What you covered

Close on the imbalance rather than on the definitions, since the definitions are already secure by now. Ask two students to read out only the line about which skill they are short of and their dated next move. Remind the class that the summary document stays in Module 2, Strand 1, that they will draw on it when they come to work on designing solutions together, and that it is one of the pieces of work that goes forward to Portfolio in Action.

ANSWERS AND LOOK-FORS

- Card sort: True - Checking facts and comparing options before you commit is critical thinking.; Problem-solving means acting to move a stuck situation forward.; Setting a deadline so a decision cannot drag on is a problem-solving move.; A trial shift to test a swap is problem-solving.
- Card sort: False - Asking a manager to swap shifts is critical thinking, not problem-solving.; Listing what you would lose if you quit already counts as solving the problem.; Ringing classmates for grade advice is problem-solving because you spoke to someone.; Once you have evaluated every option carefully, you have finished...
- Document annotator: "I checked my mock timetable against the rota and saw three clashes in..." - Critical thinking: evaluating - She gathers and compares facts before she changes anything. That is evaluation.
- Document annotator: "I listed what I would lose if I dropped the job: the money for the..." - Critical thinking: evaluating - Weighing costs and consequences is critical thinking, even when the list is short and personal.
- Document annotator: "I rang two classmates who had cut hours last year and asked what..." - Critical thinking: evaluating - Seeking other people's evidence before deciding is evaluation, not yet a fix.
- Document annotator: "I asked my manager whether I could swap those three shifts rather..." - Problem-solving: acting - She makes a real request that could change the situation. That is action.
- Document annotator: "I tried one swapped shift last Thursday to see whether the café could..." - Problem-solving: acting - A trial run is problem-solving. It also creates new evidence she can evaluate afterwards.
- Document annotator: "I set a deadline: decide by Sunday night so the rota for next month..." - Problem-solving: acting - Putting a time limit on the decision is an action that stops endless evaluating.
- Document annotator: "I told my manager on Sunday that I would keep two shifts and drop..." - Problem-solving: acting - The commitment is spoken and the plan changes. Pure problem-solving close.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Mistaking checking options for acting: evaluating stays in thought until something external changes.
- Writing about a past or hypothetical decision: redirect to a current real choice.
- Stopping without naming the imbalance or a dated next move.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE LEFT WITH

- Critical Thinking Summary: real decision, labelled moves, next step