

RESOURCE 01

How to Think Critically About Psychology

A guide to evaluating psychological claims, advice, and evidence.

PsyMosaïque was created to explore psychology through research, context, and multiple perspectives. Before we ask you to read any of our psychology content, we want to begin with something more fundamental: the tools to question it.



This resource introduces critical thinking tools you can use everywhere - including here.

PSYMOAÏQUE





START HERE

Psychology is more than therapy

To think critically about psychology, we first need to know what psychology is trying to study.

Psychology is often reduced to therapy, diagnoses, or conversations about mental health. Those are part of the field, but the discipline is much broader: it studies observable behavior and internal mental processes.

Behavior

What people and other animals do: actions, choices, communication, habits, learning, sleep, and social interaction.

Mental processes

Internal experiences: thoughts, perceptions, memories, beliefs, emotions, dreams, expectations, and interpretations.

Why it matters

Psychology does more than explain distress. It investigates how people think, feel, perceive, learn, relate, develop, and adapt.

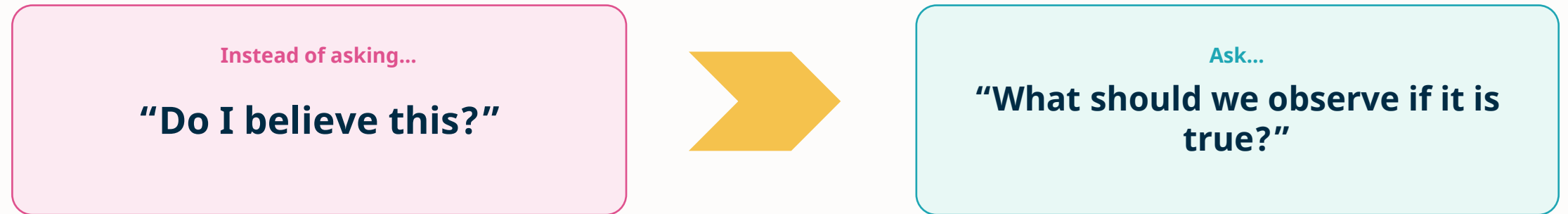
Psychology = the scientific study of behavior + mental processes



Science changes the question

Believing or disbelieving a claim is not the first step.

One of the most useful things psychological science can teach us is to slow down the first reaction. Instead of deciding whether a claim sounds right, we can ask what the claim would predict if it were true - and whether those predictions can be compared with evidence.



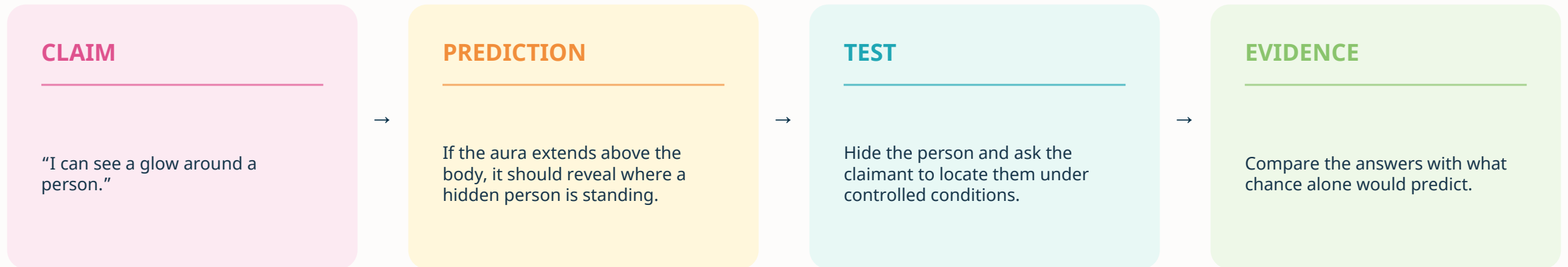
Critical thinking begins when we turn reactions into questions.



The James Randi aura test

A strange example makes the logic of testability easy to see.

Why use an example about auras in a psychology resource? Because we do not need to begin by deciding whether a claim is ridiculous, believable, spiritual, scientific, or intuitive. We can first ask: if this claim were true, what should happen?



Do not decide by vibe. Ask what the claim predicts - and whether those predictions survive testing.



Curiosity, skepticism, and humility

Critical thinking is not the same as being suspicious of everything.

Good scientific thinking requires a balance: enough curiosity to investigate possibilities, enough skepticism to ask for evidence, and enough humility to recognize when the evidence does not support what we expected. Remove any one of the three and our reasoning gets weaker.

Curiosity

Keeps us open.

Ask: What could be happening here?
Does it work? How could we test it?

Skepticism

Keeps us careful.

Ask: What exactly is being claimed? How
do we know?

Humility

Keeps us correctable.

Ask: What evidence would make me
revise my view?

Curiosity keeps us open. Skepticism keeps us careful. Humility keeps us correctable.



Intellectual humility: knowing what you do not know

One obstacle to critical thinking is simple: we do not always know when we do not know something.

Intellectual humility does not mean assuming we are wrong about everything. It means being able to distinguish between what we know, what we think we know, and what we have not actually established.

Which of these sound familiar?

PROPER NUMBER

SUBJUNCTIVE SCALING

DECLARATIVE FRACTION

All three were invented by the researchers.

**“I do not know” protects us
from filling gaps with
confidence.**

Knowing where your knowledge stops is part of thinking well - not evidence that you failed.



KEEP THIS

The PsyMosaïque Critical Thinking Checklist

This is the tool we want readers to take away from this resource.

Use these questions when reading a psychology article, watching a video, listening to a podcast, hearing a claim about therapy, encountering self-help advice - or reading something on PsyMosaïque. You do not need specialist training to ask good questions.

1

What exactly is being claimed?

Can I state the claim clearly?

2

Who is making the claim?

What is their relevant expertise?

3

How do they know?

Where did the information come from?

4

What evidence is being used?

Is there evidence at all?

5

Anecdote or systematic evidence?

One experience or a studied pattern?

6

Correlation or causation?

Does the evidence show cause?

7

What else could explain this?

Are alternatives considered?

8

What biases, values, or incentives matter?

What could shape the message?

9

What evidence would change my mind?

Is my conclusion open to revision?

The goal is not to doubt everything. It is to know why you believe what you believe.



Feelings matter. Feelings and facts are not identical.

Critical thinking lets us respect subjective experience without automatically treating it as proof of an external claim.

Psychology deals with subjective experience, so feelings matter enormously. An emotion can tell us something important about what a person is experiencing. But an internal experience and a factual claim about the external world are different kinds of information.

Subjective experience

"I feel unsafe."

This is information about someone's internal experience. The feeling itself is real.

Empirical claim

"This situation is objectively dangerous."

This makes an additional claim about external conditions and requires additional evidence.

Respect the experience. Investigate the claim.



Anecdote can start a question. It cannot finish it.

Personal stories matter. They just cannot answer every kind of question.

Personal stories can help us understand experiences, notice patterns, generate questions, and identify possibilities worth studying. The problem begins when we ask one person's experience to answer a question it cannot answer.

"It worked for me."

This can tell us what happened to one person. It can generate a hypothesis, offer lived context, or point toward something worth studying.

"Does it tend to work?"

This asks a broader question: how common is the result, compared with what, for whom, under what conditions, and with what alternatives?

Anecdotes can show that something happened. They do not automatically show why it happened or what generally happens.



Evaluating psychology content online

Psychological literacy is not only learning concepts. It is learning how to evaluate the information carrying those concepts.

PsyMosaïque exists in the same information environment as social media, podcasts, news articles, therapist websites, wellness content, self-help material, and countless other sources discussing psychology. A polished design, confident speaker, professional title, scientific vocabulary, or large audience does not answer the key question:

What supports the claim?

AUTHOR

Who wrote it, and what is their relevant expertise?

CLAIM

What are they actually saying?

SOURCE

Do they show where the information came from?

EVIDENCE

Anecdote, study, review - or no evidence?

CAUSE

Are they claiming cause from association?

AGENDA

What values, incentives, or sales pitch may matter?

Use these questions on content you disagree with and content you desperately want to be true.



Psychology can study what works. It cannot choose your values for you.

Evidence can inform a decision. It cannot make every decision for us.

Psychology often moves from describing human behavior to helping people change it. Evidence can help us investigate whether a strategy tends to produce a particular outcome. But there is another question science cannot answer on evidence alone: is that the outcome we should want?

Science can help ask

- Does this intervention reduce this symptom?
- Does this method improve learning?
- Is this behavior associated with an outcome?
- Under what conditions does this appear to work?

Values still ask

- Is this goal meaningful to me?
- Is this outcome desirable?
- What am I willing to sacrifice?
- Is the advice compatible with my values and circumstances?

Evidence can guide action. Values help decide direction.



Keep your curiosity. Slow down your certainty.

Critical thinking is a habit, not a personality type.

Critical thinking does not require becoming an expert in every area of psychology. It begins with learning to tolerate a little uncertainty, ask where information comes from, distinguish experience from general evidence, consider other explanations, and remain willing to change your mind.

These are the habits we want to bring into every PsyMosaïque resource - and the habits we hope you bring when reading us.

ASK BETTER QUESTIONS • FOLLOW THE EVIDENCE • STAY CORRECTABLE



Sources and citation notes

This resource is based on Myers, DeWall, and Gruber's Chapter 1 discussion of psychological science, testability, the scientific attitude, intellectual humility, and critical thinking.

Primary citation

Myers, D. G., DeWall, C. N., & Gruber, J. (2024). Psychology (14th ed.). Macmillan Learning.

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Textbook-cited sources used or referenced here

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