10.9: Key Guidelines for Critical Decision Making

From their textbook, Psychology 12th edition, Carole Wade, Carol Tavris and Alan Swinkels list some important and useful guidelines for critical decision-making.

**Ask questions; be willing to wonder.** Always be on the lookout for questions that have not been answered by the experts in the field or by the media. Be willing to ask “What’s wrong here?” and/or “Why is this the way it is,” and “How did it come to be that way?”

**Define the problem.** An inadequate formulation of a question can produce misleading or incomplete answers. Ask neutral questions that don’t presuppose answers.

**What evidence supports or refutes this argument and its opposition?** Just because many people believe, including so-called experts, it doesn’t make it so.

**Analyze assumptions and biases.** All of us are subject to biases, beliefs that prevent us from being impartial. Evaluate the assumptions and biases that lie behind the arguments, including your own.

**Control emotional reasoning.** “If I feel this way, it must be true.” Passionate commitment to a view can motivate a person to think boldly without fear of what others will say, but when “gut feelings” replace clear thinking, the results can be disastrous.

**Don’t oversimplify.** Look beyond the obvious, rest easy generalizations, and reject either/or thinking. Don’t argue solely by anecdote.

**Consider other interpretations.** Formulate hypotheses that offer reasonable explanations of characteristics, behavior, and events.
Tolerate uncertainty. Sometimes the evidence merely allows us to draw tentative conclusions. Don’t be afraid to say, "I don't know." Don’t demand "the answer."¹

Reference