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

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**Reference**