



Mindset of a Scholar-Researcher

Throughout the core and concentration courses you are developing skills needed to be an independent Principal Investigator of a social science research project. These skills include diligent scientific inquiry and creativity, independent thinking, proactive project planning and implementation, self-direction, and ethical leadership. Each small action you take along the way builds your professional habits, capabilities, dispositions in these areas.

As an ethical scholar-researcher you can demonstrate leadership by: contributing the highest quality work you can produce, attending to the dispositions necessary for success, and supporting your cohort members in their efforts to achieve excellence in their work and activities. As a community of scholar-researchers Concordia encourages the development and enacting of the following dispositions in our faculty and candidates:

Professional Discourse and Dispositions in the Doctorate of Education Program

The doctorate of education program prepares professionals for transformational service in organizations and institutions across the country and around the world. One component of this preparation is development of the candidate's skills for professional practice, including skills for professional conduct, growth, and communication. As a result, the doctoral program holds candidates and faculty to high professional and ethical standards for conduct, growth, and communication within the program.

Conduct

The program requires that candidates and faculty consider the following points when collaborating or interacting with members of the academic community:

- Concordia scholars act in ways that build a shared community of ethical activity and discourse;
- Concordia scholars understand that actions which harm one member of the community harm the entire community;
- Concordia scholars comport themselves in ways that encourage the personal and collaborative growth of other scholar-researchers in the community; and
- Concordia scholars temper confidence and self-assuredness, with grace and care for human beings.

Growth

The program requires that candidates and faculty consider the following points regarding the growth of scholar-researchers within the academic community:

- For Concordia scholars, knowledge development is a shared practice that must encourage the growth of the entire community;

- For Concordia scholars, growth in ethical action is always possible and can be achieved through precise and focused reasoning and conversation, undergirded by ethical modeling;
- Concordia scholars seek truth, support inquiry, and look to the transformational growth of others through their activities; and
- Concordia scholars strive to understand all members of the community—looking toward others’ growth—while recognizing that understanding makes us stronger individually and corporately.

Communication

The program requires that candidates and faculty consider the following points when delivering any verbal or written communication in the program:

- Concordia scholars communicate with others in the way they would hope to be communicated with;
- When communicating, Concordia scholars consider and advance the best-interests of others;
- Concordia scholars use respectful, non-intimidating language;
- Concordia scholars refrain from abusive, emotionally-charged, or negative language;
- Concordia scholars ensure that each communication reflects their role as an ethical educator, who is responsible for minimizing harm to other human beings; and
- Concordia scholars ensure that their communication reflects their role as a servant leader in the Concordia community who is becoming an “agent of positive change, through ethical, humble and rigorous leadership, with and for one’s community and around the world.” (Concordia University, 2018)

A second set of important dispositions for Concordia’s Ed.D. community can be found in a central text that is used in the Year 2 Research Curriculum—Lawrence A. Machi’s and Brenda T. McEvoy’s (2016) book, *The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success*. The authors present the following dispositions as critical to success for the scholar-researcher.

MINDSET: PERSONAL DISPOSITIONS ON THINKING, DOING, AND DECIDING

A person’s mental and emotional state plays a vital role in the outcome of the work undertaken. If this state is negative, a successful outcome is doubtful. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the procedure for doing a literature review is an application of a critical-thinking process. Critical thinking, however, is not just a recipe for thinking, it is also a specific mindset—a particular mental and emotional state. This mindset or disposition defines how you choose to be and to act when working on an analytical task such as a literature review.

. . . the critical thinker's mindset can be divided into three types of dispositions: intellect, action, and decision making. Each disposition identifies its traits and behaviors.

Intellectual Dispositions

Intellectual dispositions describe the type of thinking a person chooses to use when engaging in a task. A critical thinker chooses to be:

- *Inquisitive.* All successful critical thinking begins with curiosity. To think critically, one must have an inquiring mind, a natural curiosity, and a fundamental need to learn and to discover. Curiosity creates the sparks that ignite a need to explore what lies beyond the currently known. This fire, in turn, sprouts the seeds that become the fragile beginnings of the research itself. Critical thinkers continually approach their work with questions such as "Why?" "What if?" and "Is it true?" These questions and others like them stimulate the inquiry and fuel the critical-thinking process.
- *Skeptical.* The critical thinker is constantly raising questions. This thinker advances with skepticism and questions everything. What is being said? What does it mean? Is it supported by good evidence? Are the conclusions reasonably and logically drawn? An inquirer is constantly learning, reflecting on past work in order to navigate the present work. This thinker maintains a healthy disregard for accepted positions and questions the factual and logical basis for any conclusions. The critical thinker knows that everyone has biases, opinions, beliefs, values, and experiences that create a unique perspective and attempts to keep these in perspective.
- *Independent.* Critical thinkers do not blindly accept the positions and conclusions of others but think for themselves. They are in the habit of raising questions, finding the relevant information, building reasoned positions, and developing their own conclusions. They seek and set standards for clarity of thought, relevance of information, and reasonableness for the positions they take. Critical thinkers are not satisfied until they truly understand both the issue under consideration and a reasonable response that addresses it.
- *Honest.* Critical thinkers hold themselves accountable for their biases, viewpoints, and the conclusions taken. They continually examine and reflect on the veracity of their positions, weighing them against new facts and ideas. They suspend judgment until all facts have been gathered and considered. They can adjust and reject their opinions and positions when new facts become known.

Action Dispositions

Action dispositions describe the behaviors and traits exhibited by a critical thinker engaged in a task. Critical thinkers exercise:

- *Persistence.* The critical thinker is diligent. Regardless of the number of hours of painstaking work, the confusion and miscues encountered, or the tedium and magnitude of the task, they stay with a project until it is completed. They are dogged about seeking relevant information, following all leads and exhausting all possibilities.
- *Patience.* Critical thinkers take the time necessary to carefully and thoroughly complete the work before them. They calmly and deliberately work through the task. They strive to be precise and understand that context and subject matter dictate precision.
- *Deliberation.* Critical thinkers take care to focus on the concern at hand. They strive to maintain orderliness when working with complex tasks. They recognize their own limitations and strive to correct their discrepancies. Critical thinkers look for the nuances when reviewing information, constantly searching for connections and patterns in the data. They take care to see both the trees and the forest.
- *Collegiality.* Critical thinkers are able to share ideas and conclusions with others for feedback and evaluation. They seek out the criticism of others with the knowledge that sharing their information confirms or improves it.

Decision-Making Dispositions

Decision-making dispositions are the thought processes used when solving problems and deciding the directions to pursue when engaging in a task. They are:

- *Reasoned and logical thinking.* Critical thinkers prefer to employ rational thinking and weigh all data for their veracity and value. They seek evidence, examine the pros and cons of any question, and take positions based on strong evidence. Critical thinkers trust in the process of reasoned thinking, evidence building, and rational arguments to make their decisions.
- *Circumspect thinking.* Critical thinkers approach the research with an open mind, considering and learning from divergent viewpoints. They strive to maintain objectivity and guard against having any predetermined conclusions. The critical thinker is open to seeing all results of an inquiry and weighing the value of each piece of evidence and each position taken. When taking a position, this thinker maintains flexibility in considering alternatives. The critical thinker reflects continually.

ETHICS

No discussion about mindset would be complete without addressing the moral issue of ethical behavior.

Every undertaking has a code of ethics. Researching and writing are no different. Consider the following tenants before you begin work:

- Do not take data out of context. Researchers may not manipulate data to defend a preferred outcome. This is not just a matter of fabricating data. It also includes extending their value.
- Do your own research. Librarians and other assistants are there to point you in the right direction, but they should not be the ones to paddle the canoe through the research sites and library stacks. Doing your own research is especially important when researching online where information is available without regard to its veracity.
- Present only what you believe to be factual. Do not use fallacious arguments to prove a case.
- Present all sides of the question. Do not be tempted to strengthen a case by omitting divergent evidence. You are searching for the truth, not enforcing a personal opinion.
- Plagiarism can easily sneak into a review unless it is carefully avoided. Remember that plagiarism is not just using another person's words. It also includes presenting ideas as your own when they are actually from another's research source.
- You must be the sole writer of your literature review. Outside readers and editors can be very helpful, but they must maintain an advisory role and not become the authors of the research project.

The ethics disposition must stand above all other dispositions as an overriding behavior for conducting research. Ethical behavior is an essential quality of the good scientist. (Machi & McEvoy, 2017, pp. 8–12)

Keep exploring and thinking of new ways to grow these skills and dispositions in yourself and the lives of those you interact with, both inside and outside of the program. You are on your way to not simply performing the activities of a scholar-researcher, but actually *becoming* a scholar-researcher as a way of life.

References

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- Machi, L. A., & McEvoy, B. T. (2016). *The literature review: Six steps to success*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.