

How can you evaluate information?

To strengthen your skill at evaluating, use the three steps listed below. You will see them in action one by one on the following screens.

Step 1: Establish a set of standards.

Step 2: Identify the positive and negative aspects of the information.

Step 3: Summarize your evaluation.

Step 1: Establish a set of standards.

Standards often require careful definition. Think about the statement, “It is warm today.” Each of these might be “warm:”

- a temperature of 100° F in Dallas, Texas, on May 1
- a temperature of 75° F in Des Moines, Iowa, on November 1
- a temperature of 50° F in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on January 1

What you consider “warm” depends on the location and the time of year. Whether “warm” is positive or negative also depends on the circumstances. A warm day in winter might be positive, but a warm day in summer might be negative.

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Directions: What are the standards you would use to evaluate each statement?

1. Americans are generous.

Answers might include how much money people donate to charities in the United States and in other countries.

2. The first baseman is a good hitter.

Answers might include the player's batting average compared to the batting averages of other first basemen.

3. The girl in the story is brave.

Answers might include how she reacts to a dangerous situation compared to how other characters react.

Step 2: Identify the positive and negative aspects of the information.

Whether something is positive or negative often depends on two things:

- your preferences
- the circumstances

For example, imagine it snowed 10 inches last night. If you loved snow or planned to go skiing, this might be positive. If you disliked snow or had to drive somewhere, it might be negative.

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Directions: Discuss the positive and negative aspects of the story of how Prometheus angered Zeus by giving fire to humans and was punished for his action.

Positive

Some positive results were that people had fire to warm themselves and to cook their food. Some people might have learned the lesson that they should disobey the gods when the gods are wrong.

Negative

Some of the negative results were that Prometheus suffered and that people might have drawn the lesson people brought on their own troubles by disobeying the gods.

Evaluating

Step 3: Summarize your evaluation.

Evaluations often include both positive and negative comments. If you summarize them in a short passage, such as a sentence or paragraph, you can indicate the balance between them.

Imagine evaluating a movie in which you liked the lead actor but not the plot. Your evaluation might be as follows:

The lead actor was wonderful, but the plot was so hard to follow that I think the movie was weak overall.

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Directions: Write a summary of the these comments about the myth of Prometheus.

Some positive results were that people had fire to warm themselves and to cook their food. Some people might have learned the lesson that they should disobey the gods when the gods are wrong.

Some of the negative results were that Prometheus suffered and that people might have drawn the lesson people brought on their own troubles by disobeying the gods.

The action of Prometheus had positive results for people but negative results for him. The lessons people learned from it were mixed.

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Directions: Use the three steps presented on previous screens to evaluate how the Greek king Sisyphus, is portrayed below.

Sisyphus was clever. For example, when Zeus ordered the Thantos to chain Sisyphus in the underworld, Sisyphus tricked Thantos into chaining himself down instead. His repeated tricks on others, though, caused the gods to condemn him to a life of rolling a huge rock up a steep hill, only to have the rock role back down again every time.

To French writer Albert Camus, Sisyphus was focused on his work, but not the result. That is, he found joy in what he did, regardless of the results. Camus believes this is a lesson for everyone.

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Step 1: Establish a set of standards.

Sisyphus was clever and focused on his work.

Step 2: Identify the positive and negative aspects of the information.

Being clever saved Sisyphus from being chained in the underworld. That was positive, but being clever also got him punished, which was negative. According to Camus, the focus on work was positive because it allowed Sisyphus to find joy in life. However, he never accomplished anything, which is negative.

Step 3: Summarize your evaluation.

Sisyphus was clever and he focused on his work, which may have brought him joy even if he could see no results from what he did.