



Epistemic Virtues

Epistemic virtues are character traits — such as curiosity, open-mindedness and humility — that support the pursuit, evaluation and responsible use of knowledge. Beyond facilitating meaningful dialogue, learning and decision-making, these qualities are especially relevant when navigating uncertainty, disagreement and complex societal issues. Reflecting on how such virtues influence our knowledge can help identify more constructive and inclusive pathways for societal change.

These virtues are not rules, but habits of mind that shape how we respond to information and each other.

Why do epistemic virtues matter?

- They help us slow down automatic judgments.
- They support collaboration across differences.
- They improve the quality of our reasoning and reflection.
- They are essential for navigating societal transitions.

Core epistemic virtues with practical meaning

Virtue	What it means in practice
Openness	Willingness to hear unfamiliar views, even when they feel uncomfortable
Curiosity	Asking questions instead of making assumptions; wanting to understand the “why.”
Modesty	Recognising that your knowledge is limited or may be wrong.
Benevolence	Trying to understand others charitably — assuming they have reasons for their views.



Everyday examples of epistemic virtues

Situation	Epistemic response with virtue	Alternative (non-virtuous) response
You hear a view that contradicts your own.	“Interesting, I wonder what they base that on.” (Curiosity)	“That’s just wrong.”
You feel irritated by a controversial video.	“Why do I feel this way?” (Openness + Modesty)	“This is clearly propaganda.”
You don’t know how to respond in a discussion.	“I’m not sure — I’d like to hear more first.” (Modesty)	“Whatever, this isn’t worth it.”
Someone expresses a belief you find naive.	“Maybe there’s something in their experience I’m missing.” (Benevolence)	“They clearly don’t understand the topic.”

Reflective questions

1. Which epistemic virtues come naturally to me?
2. Which do I find more difficult to practice?
3. How would discussions or group work improve if everyone applied these virtues more consciously?



Understanding Epistemic Criteria

Epistemic criteria are the — often implicit — standards we use to assess whether information is trustworthy, relevant or credible. They guide how we evaluate, accept or reject knowledge.

These criteria vary between individuals and contexts and are shaped by education, personal experiences, culture, values and emotions. Becoming aware of your epistemic criteria helps you reflect critically on how you engage with knowledge, not just *what* you believe, but *why*.

Why are epistemic criteria important?

- They shape your judgments — often without you realising it.
- They determine how open you are to unfamiliar or conflicting perspectives.
- They influence how you learn, discuss, and collaborate.

Examples of epistemic criteria, grouped by type

1. Source-related criteria	Authority: “The speaker is an expert in this field.”	Credibility: “This website shares factual and well-researched information.”	Independence: “This report comes from a neutral organisation, not a lobby group.”
2. Content-based criteria	Consistency with prior knowledge: “This matches what I’ve learned before.”	Logical coherence: “The argument is clear and logically structured.”	Empirical evidence: “There are data, statistics, or observations to support it.”
3. Experience-based criteria	Personal experience: “This fits with what I’ve seen or lived through.”	Sensory cues: “The images seem real, not staged or manipulated.”	Narrative persuasiveness: “The story feels authentic and emotionally convincing.”
4. Contextual or relational criteria	Perceived intention: “The speaker seems honest and well-meaning.”	Emotional resonance: “It feels sincere/manipulative/biased.”	Cognitive dissonance: “This challenges my worldview or values.”



5. Value-based criteria	Moral alignment: “This conflicts with my ethical beliefs.”	Social legitimacy: “People in my community don’t take this seriously.”	Societal impact: “The consequences of this information seem harmful.”
--------------------------------	---	---	--

Reflective questions

1. What criteria do I use to decide whether I trust a piece of information?
2. How do emotions or values influence my judgment?
3. Am I aware that others may use different criteria than I do?
4. How do my criteria affect my openness to new perspectives?