

(Re)Learning Moment

Critical and Liberal

Within diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, individuals approach their work from different viewpoints and stances. Two common stances are critical and liberal. While sometimes used interchangeably, these two approaches feature different values and practices within DEI initiatives.

Critical *noun*

a philosophical approach that seeks to critique and overcome social, historical, and ideological forces that harm people

Many scholars credit Immanuel Kant for founding **critical** philosophy, which evolved into critical theory within various fields such as education, family sciences, and communications. Commonly applied critical theories include critical race, feminisms, and queer theories. Individuals with a critical approach critique and challenge power structures. Critical ideology values human liberation, and people often utilize this worldview to reduce harm to peoples and communities.

Liberal *noun*

a philosophical approach that promotes individual rights, civil liberties, democracy, and free enterprise

Liberal philosophy (also known as liberalism) most often relates to politics and morality. Cited as a dominant modern ideology, President Franklin D. Roosevelt popularized liberalism in the United States through the New Deal program. Contrastingly to the critical philosophy, liberal individuals focus on individual rights and freedoms rather than critiquing systems in advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.

(Re)Learn About Critical and Liberal

- [Critical Theory as a Philosophy of Research](#) - video explaining critical theory
- [What Is Liberalism?](#) - video explaining liberalism and its history