

Be Open-Minded, but Don't Let Your Brain Fall Out

by Dr. Jay L. Wile, Ph.D.

Let's start with what "Open-Minded" Means

"Receptive to arguments or ideas"

– The Merriam-Webster Dictionary

Note what it DOES NOT mean:

- ☞ Gullible
- ☞ Wishy-Washy
- ☞ Unwilling to believe strongly in things
- ☞ Post-Modern
- ☞ Being a proponent of relativism

Why is Being "Open-Minded" Important?

- ☞ If I hadn't been an open-minded atheist, I would not be a Christian today.
- ☞ In science, being open-minded is incredibly important, because **the scientific consensus is often wrong!**

In the early 1980s, Dr. Dan Shechtman made some crystals, and when he examined them under the microscope, he said:

Eyn chaya kazo

Which is Hebrew for, "There is no such creature."

He said that because the scientific consensus stated quite clearly that such crystals were not possible.

He tried to publish his results, calling his creation **quasicrystals**

He could not publish in any of the journals that he normally published in, because they said his results were impossible.

One of the most important chemists at the time (Linus Pauling) stated, "There is no such thing as quasicrystals, only quasiscientists."

The head of the lab he was in asked him to resign.

Eventually, an open-minded scientific journal (with a much lower reputation than the typical journals he published in) published his work.

Open-minded scientists tried to replicate his results. They were able to.

He won the Nobel Prize in 2011 for demonstrating quite conclusively that the scientific consensus was wrong.

Your Open-Mindedness MUST be Tempered...

You must treat new information with caution.

One very important assumption in the Big Bang model is that the early universe experienced an episode of **inflation**.

In March of 2014, analysis of a large set of astrophysics data seemed to offer support for it.

Scientific American stated this:

“Physicists have found a long-predicted twist in light from the big bang that represents the first image of ripples in the universe called gravitational waves, researchers announced today. **The finding is direct proof of the theory of inflation**, the idea that the universe expanded extremely quickly in the first fraction of a nanosecond after it was born.”

In April of 2015, the conclusion was shown to be the result of cosmic dust.

This example demonstrates two things about being open minded.

New information is often wrong. You should never put too much faith in it until it has aged a bit.

You need to constantly watch for updates.

That second one is hard, because the correction is often less popular, so it is harder to find.

The Bible Puts It Best

“As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming” **-Ephesians 4:14**

“Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But **examine everything carefully**; hold fast to that which is good”
-1 Thessalonians 5:19-21

How Do We Achieve This “Tempered” Open-Mindedness?

1. Look at issues from more than one side. If you read only one side of an issue, it is easy to miss vital information, especially when you are not knowledgeable in a subject related to the issue.

I apply this to all areas of my life. I read philosophers, theologians, and scientists with whom I disagree. At minimum, it helps me understand issues more completely.

So....

Do you think the origin and diversity of life is best explained by evolution?

Read the works of some creationists.

Do you think the origin and diversity of life is best explained by creation?

Read the works of some evolutionists.

When I homeschooled my daughter, her science curriculum was creationist, but we read Richard Dawkins and other evolutionists to see their arguments.

2. Avoid believing things for emotional reasons. Emotions are not bad, but they are not reliable and are easily manipulated.

Examples of what I mean:

- ☞ Believing something because someone you respect believes it
- ☞ Believing something because you really want it to be true
- ☞ Believing something because of the charisma of a proponent.
- ☞ Believing something because people pressure you to believe it

3. Don't be afraid to admit that you are wrong. Being wrong is a part of being human. We will all find we were wrong about some things when we get to heaven!

4. Respect those who disagree with you.

I am not talking about "being nice," because that should go without saying. I am talking about not dismissing someone's argument (especially someone more knowledgeable than you) because you disagree.

5. Remember 1 Thessalonians 5:21 ("examine everything carefully") and 2 Timothy 2:15 ("Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.")

This is probably the hardest of all of them, because it requires a lot of work. There are a lot of bad ideas wrapped up in arguments that initially sound very convincing. You need to be diligent when you investigate new ideas.

Be Skeptical When Little or No Evidence is Given

My general rule of thumb is that extraordinary statements require extraordinary evidence.

On the issue of global warming, for example, the statement is that the actions of people can, in essence, cause massive disruption to the planet. That kind of statement needs extraordinary evidence.

The only evidence offered, however, is computer models that can't even reproduce the past and recent temperature increases that do not seem to be abnormal on a historical scale.

Check References

When evidence is given, make sure that the evidence really does say what the author claims it says.

In 2006, neuropsychiatrist Louann Brizendine's book, *The Female Brain*, claims that studies show that women use on average 20,000 words per day, while men use only 7000.

In fact, I cannot find a single study that says this. The most recent study I have found say they each use about 16,000 words per day on average. [Matthias R. Mehl, *et al.*, "Are Women Really More Talkative Than Men?" *Science* 317: 82, 2007]

It is impossible to check all references, because some people use a LOT of references. In some cases, it is to give the "air" of being scholarly. However, you can check key references. Try to find the vital parts of the argument and check the references related to those.

Be skeptical of "lone gunmen"

While a single individual might very well be right about an issue, it is easier for such a person to end up being wrong, because he or she just doesn't have all the expertise necessary to tackle an issue. Groups with a variety of experts are more likely to be correct than a single individual.

Be skeptical when experts are dismissed

Experts have a lot of knowledge, and it is just silly to dismiss them because they disagree with you. However, this happens all the time.

- ☞ Young-earth creationists dismiss old-earth theologians like Gleason Archer, who knows at least eight old-testament languages.
- ☞ Old-earth theologians dismiss research done by experts like Russell Humphreys simply because his research indicates a young earth.

The fact that they are experts doesn't make them right, but it does make them people to hear out. Argue with their evidence, not what you see as motives or preconceptions

Be skeptical of conspiracy explanations

Often, people make excuses for the fact that most of the evidence doesn't support their claims because of some conspiracy. There might be financial interests or other interests that supposedly keep the evidence from being shown.

While it is certainly POSSIBLE for things to be covered up, it is less and less likely in today's society. If an argument depends too heavily on the idea of a conspiracy, it is probably not an idea that has much merit.

Be skeptical of information found only on the web.

Although the internet is a great resource for information, it is also a great resource for lies:

- ☞ The moon landings were not faked.
- ☞ Charles Darwin **DID NOT** renounce evolution and become a Christian on his deathbed.
- ☞ The earth is not flat!

To avoid being fooled by such things, make sure you look for those trying to refute the claims.

Because it is so quick and easy to publish on the internet, it can actually be used as a check against itself.

If you are researching something on the internet and come across a fact that is new to you, copy and paste that fact into a search engine and see what comes up. If you copied and pasted many of the things I have debunked into a search engine, you will find evidence that debunks each of them.

Check Everything With Prayer and Scripture

God does speak to us through prayer and the study of Scripture. Obviously, you can mistake the devil for God (2 Corinthians 11:14), so you need to exercise discernment.

Your brothers and sisters in Christ are a great resource as well. I have a trusted brother that I discuss many things with. He helps me to see things in new ways, and he helps me to evaluate new ideas. If you want to use such people to help you in your quest for tempered open-mindedness, however, they need to be open-minded themselves.