



Critical Thinking Exercise

Study Development Worksheet

Critical Thinking: Compare, Contrast and Reflect

1. Identify which of the two excerpts below is more critical, and why:

Fisher and Scriven describe critical thinking as 'a skilled, active interpretation and evaluation of observations, communications, information and argumentation' (1997, p.20). Russell states that 'the intelligent are full of doubt' (1998, p.28). Facione et al. (2000, p.101) argue that without scrutiny, the following type of texts would be common: 'intellectually dishonest, intolerant, inattentive, haphazard, mistrustful of reason, indifferent, and simplistic.' Orwell has the following attributed to him: 'During times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.'

Critical thinking is a notoriously difficult term to define, although Fisher and Scriven's classification of it as 'a skilled, active interpretation and evaluation of observations, communications, information, and argumentation' (1997, p.20) captures many of its essential details. Echoing Russell's truism that 'the intelligent are full of doubt' (1998, p.28), Facione et al (2000, p.101) argue that without this doubt, academic study would allow biased, prejudiced and illogical texts to not be scrutinised properly. Although the saying attributed to Orwell that 'during times of universal deceit, telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act' may be a little too political for the academic context, the idea is still a strong one.

Adapted from Stella Cottrell (1997), *The Study Skills Handbook*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.

2. Read the following passage and highlight any assertion which can be challenged. In each case, explain why:

Students from countries which can broadly be said to have a 'Confucian system' (particularly China, Japan and South Korea) have difficulty with critical thinking because of the academic cultures, found in these countries. I have taught many people from this part of the world, and they always seem to have difficulties. Clearly, therefore, your mother tongue is also an important factor. In my opinion,



French and German speakers also have significant problems in this respect. Research (e.g. Smith 2001; Barton 2004) indicates that it is not only overseas students who have problems with critical thinking, but British students as well. This research is supported by www.criticalthinkingcourses.com.

Adapted from Chris Sowton (2012), *50 Steps to improving your academic writing*. Garnet Education.

3. Read the following and passage and, using the critical analysis checklist (on page 3), highlight what might be problematic about the passage.

Rochborough Health

Outdoor play has beneficial effects for children in terms of both their health and their levels of social interaction. According to clinical trials carried out by Rochborough's Health Council Advisory Body in September this year, children who played outside for over 50 days in the year had a 20% higher lung capacity, and a 30% lower incidence of asthma and bronchial conditions than children who played indoors. Children who played outdoors also reported having more friends than those who played indoors. A survey of 30 families by Rochborough Social Amenities Committee found that parents were more likely to let their children play outdoors if they had their own gardens or if there were supervised play areas nearby. Mr Arkash of Milton Road said his children did not feel safe playing on the Children's meadow on the outskirts of Rochborough, as his son had been frightened by a fox there in the past. His little son looked quite tearful as he spoke. 'He often cries because he has nowhere to play,' said his father. Supervised play areas can be expensive to provide. However, only 18% of homes in Rochborough have gardens. Therefore, to improve the health of all its children, Rochborough needs to provide more supervised outdoor play areas.

Rochborough Playcouncil Newsletter

Adapted from Stella Cottrell (1997), *The Study Skills Handbook*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.



Critical Analysis Checklist

Critical Questions	Analysis
What is the main argument?	
What is the key evidence used to support the argument? Are there any flaws in the evidence?	
Are there any flaws in the argument? Is evidence interpreted and used correctly?	
Is there any bias in the writer's argument?	
Has the writer considered alternative points of view?	
Is the conclusion convincing?	

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