

CTL Bulletin

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A bi-weekly information sheet by the Center for Teaching and Learning

Critical Thinking Rubric

The Critical Thinking Rubric presented in this CTL Bulletin was created to facilitate embedded assessment of goal 2 of the Gen-Ed program. A random set of student papers across our Gen-Ed courses will be selected and scored by a panel of faculty readers using the Rubric. Beyond Gen-Ed assessment, the Rubric can also serve other functions. Virtually all instructors in all disciplines see it as their goal to help their students become critical thinkers. The Rubric helps define critical thinking in some detail. Most critical thinking tasks that instructors want their students to perform will be characterized by several if not all of the criteria described in the Rubric. The Rubric not only defines the key dimensions of critical thinking, it also illustrates for students the typical performance levels on each dimension from “limited or no proficiency” to “high proficiency.” Not each task in a course may require all seven criteria, but with the Rubric instructors can point their students to the ones that are important for a given assignment. Students then know ahead of time how their instructor will assess their work. It takes much of the ambiguity out of essay grading and over time produces better learning results. Imagine what would happen if students saw the same (or very similar) criteria used for critical thinking tasks across most of their courses. Critical thinking takes time to develop. Redundancy of grading criteria across courses could help develop such skills in our students.

The current Rubric was designed to work best with a student paper that:

- Presents an open-ended, ill-defined problem which has more than one appropriate answer.
- Either has a predetermined topic or allows the student to define a topic within certain parameters.
- Requires the student to develop a meaningful argument supported by evidence and followed by a conclusion.
- Is related to course readings or other sources that the student ought to consider as he or she critiques arguments from the literature and/or develops arguments of his or her own.

The Rubric’s criteria include aspects of critical thinking that essays in just about any field should incorporate for a thoughtful analysis. These criteria are:

1. ISSUE/S: Identifies and concisely explains the problem/question at issue
2. CONTEXT: Recognizes the influence of the context on different stakeholders and the issue
3. OWN PERSPECTIVE: Presents the student’s own perspective and position related to the issue
4. OTHER PERSPECTIVES: Considers other salient perspectives and positions relevant to the issue
5. ASSUMPTIONS: Evaluates the key assumptions behind the claims and recommendations made
6. EVIDENCE: Evaluates the quality of supporting data/evidence and provides additional data as needed
7. IMPLICATIONS: Evaluates conclusions, implications, and consequences

Of course, you can modify each criterion—together with its performance levels—depending on the specifics of your discipline and your course. That’s what faculty at Washington State University have done, where the first version of this Rubric was developed (you can check out the different disciplinary variations at:

<http://wsuctproject.cctl.wsu.edu/ctr.htm>). NEIU’s version of the Rubric was developed by the General Education Committee, with special involvement of members of the Philosophy department and of the CTL.

NEIU's Critical Thinking Rubric

Quality Criteria	No/Limited Proficiency (1 point)	Some Proficiency (2 points)	Proficiency (3 points)	High Proficiency (4 points)	Rating (1,2,3,4pts)
1. Identifies & explains ISSUES	Fails to identify, summarize, or explain the main problem or question. (OR) Represents the issues inaccurately or inappropriately.	Identifies main issues but does not summarize or explain them clearly or sufficiently	Successfully identifies and summarizes the main issues, but does not explain why/how they are problems or create questions	Clearly identifies and summarizes main issues and successfully explains why/how they are problems or questions; and identifies embedded or implicit issues, addressing their relationships to each other.	
2. Recognizes stakeholders and CONTEXTS (i.e., cultural/social, educational, technological, political, scientific, economic, ethical, personal experience)	Fails accurately to identify and explain any empirical or theoretical contexts for the issues. (OR) Presents problems as having no connections to other conditions or contexts.	Shows some general understanding of the influences of empirical and theoretical contexts on stakeholders, but does not identify any specific ones relevant to situation at hand.	Correctly identifies all the empirical and most of the theoretical contexts relevant to all the main stakeholders in the situation.	Not only correctly identifies all the empirical and theoretical contexts relevant to all the main stakeholders, but also finds minor stakeholders and contexts and shows the tension or conflicts of interests among them.	
3. Frames personal responses and acknowledges other PERSPECTIVES	Fails to formulate and clearly express own point of view, (OR) fails to anticipate objections to his/her point of view, (OR) fails to consider other perspectives and position.	Formulates a vague and indecisive point of view, (OR) anticipates minor but not major objections to his/her point of view, (OR) considers weak but not strong alternative positions.	Formulates a clear and precise personal point of view concerning the issue, and seriously discusses its weaknesses as well as its strengths.	Not only formulates a clear and precise personal point of view, but also acknowledges objections and rival positions and provides convincing replies to these.	
4. Evaluates ASSUMPTIONS	Fails to identify and evaluate any of the important assumptions behind the claims and recommendations made.	Identifies some of the most important assumptions, but does not evaluate them for plausibility or clarity.	Identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but not the ones deeper in the background – the more abstract ones.	Not only identifies and evaluates all the important assumptions, but also some of the more hidden, more abstract ones.	
5. Evaluates EVIDENCE	Fails to identify data and information that counts as evidence for truth-claims and fails to evaluate its credibility.	Successfully identifies data and information that counts as evidence but fails to thoroughly evaluate its credibility.	Identifies all important evidence and rigorously evaluates it.	Not only identifies and rigorously evaluates all important evidence offered, but also provides new data or information for consideration.	
6. Evaluates IMPLICATIONS , conclusions, and consequences	Fails to identify implications, conclusions, and consequences of the issue, (OR) the key relationships between the other elements of the problem, such as context, assumptions, or data and evidence.	Suggests some implications, conclusions, and consequences, but without clear reference to context, assumptions, data, and evidence.	Identifies and briefly discusses implications, conclusions, and consequences considering most but not all the relevant assumptions, contexts, data, and evidence.	Identifies and thoroughly discusses implications, conclusions, and consequences, considering all relevant assumptions, contexts, data, and evidence.	