

Critical Reasoning

Student Learning Outcome: Students will demonstrate university-level critical reasoning proficiencies through written expression.

The Value of Critical Reasoning

Critical reasoning is a form of high-order thinking and writing that requires students to analyze arguments based on the conventions of logic and coherence, distinguish sound premises from faulty ones, detect fallacy from fact, discern strong from weak conclusions, recognize patterns of

cause and effect, determine consequences, evaluate sources, and become information literate. Critical reasoning provides the foundation for academic excellence, professional expertise, and informed citizenship.

Supporting Skills

1. Students will craft a thesis-driven argument using the critical reasoning skills.
2. Students will demonstrate information literacy by selecting, situating, and evaluating sources within a broader intellectual conversation, and citing them appropriately.
3. Students will demonstrate the ability to develop paragraphs and organize them in a logical progression.
4. Students will demonstrate proper use of grammar, mechanics, diction, usage, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.

Course Content Criteria

(Courses must meet all categories in Content Criteria. In order to meet these requirements, potential instructors will attend training and grading workshops supervised by the Critical Reasoning coordinator.)

1. Courses in this category emphasize the skills of critical reasoning and research-based analytical writing.
2. Courses in this category build on the learning outcome and skills for WRTR 1312 (Academic Writing).
3. Courses in this category require 4500–6000 words of formal, closely graded, out-of-class writing (approximately 15–20 full pages, double-spaced, in Times New Roman 12).
4. Courses in this category lead students through the processes of drafting and revision.
5. Courses in this category cultivate skills of information literacy to locate, evaluate, and use source materials that are reliable, relevant, and persuasive. In addressing the importance of
6. Courses in this category culminate in a thesis-driven research paper composed in stages, including drafts and an annotated bibliography. Topics should consider issues of social and ethical importance.
7. Courses in this category use the critical reasoning framework designed by the WRTR 1313 committee.
8. Courses in this category use feedback and commenting language common to SMU writing courses.

Glossary

1. **Annotated bibliography:** A list of sources with a brief paragraph following each entry summarizing, assessing, and evaluating the work.
2. **Argument:** A coherent series of reasons, statements, or facts intended to support or establish a claim or claims.
3. **Closely graded:** Graded with close attention to mechanics, grammar, and diction, as well to content. Instructors not only point out errors but also explain how to correct them. Feedback includes a terminal comment as well as in-text commentary. Instructors use the WRTR 1313 rubric as part of the grading process.
4. **Conclusion:** A statement that follows logically from the premises.
5. **Critical reasoning:** Following the lead of John Dewey, critical reasoning is the “active, persistent, careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.” More specifically, students engaging in critical reasoning analyze, conceptualize, interpret, synthesize, or evaluate information, and ground their claims in appropriate internal evidence or external sources. Critical reasoning promotes the values of clarity, accuracy, precision, consistency, relevance, sound evidence, validity, depth, breadth, and fairness.
6. **Drafting:** A process through which students will respond to the assignment in multiple stages that might include brainstorming, outlining, creating an initial version of the assignment, peer editing, conferencing, and revision.
7. **Information literacy:** Encompasses the discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced, and the use of information according to the standards of critical thinking established throughout the course.
8. **Internal evidence:** The materials within a work that, when analyzed, reveal the relations of its parts to the whole.
9. **Premise:** An initial statement or assumption that forms the basis of an argument.
10. **Revision:** The process of assessing drafts for clarity, cohesion, precision, and argumentation.
11. **Sources:** Works of art, computer code, peer-reviewed scholarship, data, public records, authoritative reference works, histories, experience, oral histories, electronic media, or other forms of knowledge accepted by scholars and practitioners in relevant fields.

Critical Reasoning Assessment Rubric

Supporting Skills	Exemplary 5	Accomplished 4	Developing 3	Beginning 2	Absent 1
Craft a thesis-driven argument using critical reasoning skills.	Accurately crafts a relevant and convincing argument based on a clear thesis, sound premises and a reliable set of claims.	Responds to the assignment by crafting a generally convincing argument based on premises and a set of claims.	Minimally responds to the assignment with dubious argument and claims.	Inaccurately responds to the assignment with inadequate attention to argument and claims.	Fails to respond to the assignment and is unable to craft a convincing argument.
Demonstrate information literacy by selecting, situating, and evaluating sources within a broader intellectual conversation, and citing them appropriately.	Demonstrates a superior ability to select pertinent sources and to identify and explain a source's primary claim; carefully locates that argument in a broader intellectual conversation. Includes external sources that are well-chosen and used effectively.	Demonstrates a clear ability to select pertinent sources and to identify and explain a source's primary claim; locates that argument in a broader intellectual conversation. Includes external sources that are sufficient and generally used effectively.	Demonstrates a general ability to select pertinent sources and explain a source's primary claim; has difficulty locating that argument in a broader intellectual conversation. Includes external sources that are minimally sufficient and used with minimum effect.	Demonstrates a minimal ability to select pertinent sources and explain a source's primary claim; fails to locate that argument in a broader intellectual conversation. Includes external sources that are inadequate and used ineffectively.	Unable to locate pertinent sources or explain a source's primary claim; fails to locate that argument in a broader intellectual conversation. Includes no external sources.
Write well-developed paragraphs and organize them in a logical progression.	Constructs paragraphs that are focused, coherent, supported by substantial and concrete supporting detail, and led by a controlling argument. Provides logical transitions that reinforce the progress of the analysis. Constructs an introduction to strongly engage initial interest and a conclusion to close the essay in compelling fashion.	Constructs paragraphs that are coherent and reasonably well supported. Provides logical transitions that signal changes in direction. Constructs an introduction to engage initial interest and a conclusion to support without merely repeating.	Constructs paragraphs that are not always coherent. Provides transitions that are functional but often formulaic. Constructs an introduction and/or conclusion that is mechanical rather than purposeful or insightful.	Constructs paragraphs that are fragmented or underdeveloped. Provides transitions that are unclear, inaccurate, or absent. Constructs an introduction that merely describes what is to follow and a conclusion that merely repeats what has been said.	Constructs paragraphs that lack a controlling idea, transitions, and coherence. Constructs an introduction and conclusion that do not satisfy any clear rhetorical purpose.
Demonstrate proper use of grammar, mechanics, diction, usage, vocabulary, spelling, and punctuation.	Employs grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling, and citations with a high degree of correctness and control. Pays close attention to detail and demonstrates a mastery of mechanics and presentation that sustain the writer's authority and credibility.	Exhibits occasional errors in grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling, and citation form. Pays attention to detail and demonstrates a fair level of mastery of mechanics and presentation. Minimal number of errors provides little distraction from overall content or credibility.	Exhibits several errors in grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling, and citation form. Pays little attention to detail and demonstrates a low level of mastery of mechanics and presentation. Multiple errors distract from content and undercut credibility.	Exhibits frequent errors in grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling, and citation form. Demonstrates lack of attention to detail and marginal mastery of mechanics and presentation. Errors obscure content and diminish credibility.	Exhibits many serious errors in grammar, syntax, punctuation, spelling, and citation form. Demonstrates no attention to detail or mastery of mechanics and presentation. Serious errors undermine content and credibility of the work, rendering it meaningless.