

## WEEK 1 CRITICAL THINKING ANNOUNCEMENT #1



**SUBJECT LINE:** *Introduction to Critical Thinking*

### WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Critical thinking is a way of examining any subject or problem with mindfulness. By reflecting on our thoughts, paying attention to others perspectives, gathering evidence to support our ideas, and recognizing the short-comings of our conclusions, we can expand our understanding of complex issues. Critical thinking allows us to open our minds in search of answers to the challenges of our academic work, our careers, and our interpersonal lives.

Critical thinking, then, is a continuous journey toward realizing our own potential as intelligent beings. There is no single formula that will magically produce critical thinking, but you have to start somewhere!

Over the next five weeks, we will examine and apply each of the following steps. To this end, we will work with a Critical Thinking Info-graphic and a Critical Thinking Guide.

Steps to Sound Reasoning:

1. Describe the Issue
2. Defining Positions
3. Evaluating Evidence
4. Comparison of Positions
5. Personal Position
6. Conclusions and Further questions

Please be sure to read the weekly **Critical Thinking: Steps to Sound Reasoning Announcement** each week. The same information can also be found in the **Questions to Guide your Thinking** Discussion Board post, which will appear as the first post on each Discussion Board.



## WEEK 1 CRITICAL THINKING ANNOUNCEMENT #2

**SUBJECT LINE:** 1. Critical Thinking: Steps to Sound Reasoning -- Describe the Issue

Steps to Sound Reasoning: Describe the Issue or Problem

### 1. Description of the Issue or Problem

Briefly summarize the issue clearly and objectively. Describe the main ideas or aspects of the issue.

- Without judgment or bias, describe the issue and clarify its key elements.
- What are the main ideas, events, definitions and concepts?
- What factors influence this issue?



## WEEK 2 CRITICAL THINKING

**SUBJECT LINE:** 2. Critical Thinking:  
Reasoning -- Defining Positions

### Step 2. Defining the Various Key



## ANNOUNCEMENT

Steps to Sound

**Positions**

Objectively examine multiple positions, perspectives and beliefs. Include positions held by professionals and experts. Are there positions that deserve a greater voice?

- How is this issue understood by different people?
- What are the various voices that are influencing this issue? Who are the parties involved and what is their interest or agenda?
- What do professionals and experts suggest? (Experts are typically academics, or those who have been involved in activities related to this issue for a long period of time.)

Again hold off on making a judgment or decision about the issue. Write your findings without bias or attempt to influence the reader.

## WEEK 3 CRITICAL THINKING ANNOUNCEMENT



**SUBJECT LINE:** 3. Critical Thinking: Steps to Sound Reasoning -- Evaluating Evidence

### Step 3. Evaluating Evidence

Evaluate evidence to identify strengths and weaknesses in arguments and counter-arguments including bias, authority, validity and strength. Are these sources and evidence reliable and credible? Why or why not?

- What evidence is relevant to the investigation of this issue?
- What information and data justifies key points of view?
- What information or positions do or do not stand up to scrutiny?

### Tips for Writing

Now it is time to look at different responses and interpretations of the issue and the key elements that you have summarized.

1. Summarize the expert opinion.
2. Why are these experts considered credible and reliable?
3. Summary others' opinions.
4. How do you assess the quality of the evidence you are examining?
5. How does assessing different perspectives on the issue affect your understanding of it?

Ashford Library Tutorial, Peer Reviewed Articles (peer reviewed articles are scholarly sources)

- Log into the Ashford Library, then paste the following link to go straight to the tutorial:
  - <http://library.ashford.edu/tutorial/peer-reviewed.aspx>
  - [Ashford Writing Center: Evaluating Internet Sources](#)
  - [Ashford Writing Center: How to Research Secondary Sources](#)
  - [Ashford Writing Center: Student Writing Standards](#)



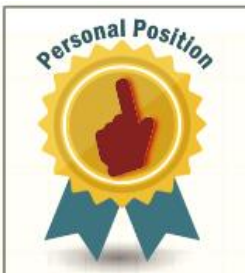
**WEEK 4 ANNOUNCEMENT. Steps to Sound Reasoning: Comparing Positions**

**SUBJECT LINE:** 4. Critical Thinking Steps to Sound Reasoning: Comparing Positions

**Step 4. Comparing Positions**

Without bias, compare and contrast positions, arguments and ideas.

- What are the essential arguments, positions, or ideas surrounding this issue?
- What key points and evidence should be included in the final analysis?
- What are the implications of the different positions?



**WEEK 5 ANNOUNCEMENT #1: Steps to Sound Reasoning: Personal Position**

**SUBJECT LINE:** 5. Critical Thinking Steps to Sound Reasoning: Personal Position

As you develop your personal position, you do the work of connecting facts, assumptions, evidence and perspectives. These connections help you to draw conclusions and develop arguments.

Also at this point you acknowledge and respond to counterarguments and weaknesses about the position you support.

- What perspectives do you agree with and why? What is your position on the issue?
- What evidence supports this position?
- What arguments challenge your position?
- What might be potential implications of your position or effects of your recommendations?

### Tips for Writing

A clearly stated position is composed of main points supported by carefully developed and substantive examples drawn credible sources.

It is time for you to find support for YOUR position. You are allowed to “agree” or “disagree” with a position you find in your readings or from the experience of experts in the field, but back up your stance by providing examples (evidence) drawn from relevant, credible sources.

1. Back up your points with detailed and specific information drawn from credible sources in order to substantiate your claims.
2. Identify and acknowledge evidence that may confirm, contradict, or challenge your initial ideas.
3. Be ready to accept changes in your initial ideas about the issue. Has the evidence you located caused you to alter or refine your position?
4. Be as *specific* as possible. Avoid vague, general, unspecific and factually deficient or inaccurate presentation of your ideas.
5. Acknowledge alternative or conflicting positions. Does your position have any weaknesses or limitations that others might point out? How would you respond to them?

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### WEEK 5 ANNOUNCEMENT #2: Conclusions, and Further Questions



**Subject Line:** 6. Critical Thinking Steps to Sound Reasoning: Conclusions and Further Questions

What further questions, sources or information would guide next steps in exploring this issue?

- What resources or ideas might provide more insight into this issue?
- What further questions should be asked?

Critical thinking is a *process*...it does not end with a finite conclusion! How does your current conclusion open a door to further thought about the issue?

1. An effective conclusion synthesizes your main points in a way that affirms the strength of your position.
2. Develop your ideas to their logical conclusions. No one-liners; *you* know what you mean, but the reader may not.
3. What questions are still unanswered? What questions are left unasked? If you had more time, what other sources or ideas would you want to explore?