

# ENCOURAGING CRITICAL THINKING IN (AND OUT OF) THE CLASSROOM

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# Workshop Objectives

As a result of this workshop, you will be able to...

- Clarify what is meant by “critical thinking”
- Recognize and discuss the importance of teaching critical thinking skills
- Identify and address the challenges of teaching critical thinking skills
- Practice techniques for applying the 2 step process of critical thinking to an ethical issue
- Consider ways YOU can incorporate critical thinking into your class/TA assignment this semester (or in the future)





# Critical Thinking

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Consider the following:

1. The black lab I had as a child was a great pet.
2. At least five of my friends have had black labs as pets, and I loved them all.
3. Therefore I should get a black lab when I choose a dog from the shelter this week.

Is this an example of good reasoning?? Is this person using good critical thinking skills? Why/why not?

# WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

**Critical thinking is the habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before formulation of an opinion, question, solution or conclusion.**

- FSU (Quality Enhancement Plan) QEP Committee

**Critical thinking consists of a two step process; first understand, then evaluate**

- Dr. Lisa Liseno, FSU



# What is critical thinking?



➤ *What critical thinking **IS NOT:***

- Thinking negatively
- Being overly judgmental

➤ *What critical thinking **Is:***

- Considering all sides of an issue to arrive at the most justified beliefs
- Taking charge of your own thinking process!
  - OWNING" your own ideas!!!


# Bloom's Taxonomy (deeper level learning requires critical thinking)

## Bloom's Taxonomy



<b>Remembering:</b> can the student recall or remember the information?	define, duplicate, list, memorize, recall, repeat, reproduce state
<b>Understanding:</b> can the student explain ideas or concepts?	classify, describe, discuss, explain, identify, locate, recognize, report, select, translate, paraphrase
<b>Applying:</b> can the student use the information in a new way?	choose, demonstrate, dramatize, employ, illustrate, interpret, operate, schedule, sketch, solve, use, write.
<b>Analyzing:</b> can the student distinguish between the different parts?	appraise, compare, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, distinguish, examine, experiment, question, test.
<b>Evaluating:</b> can the student justify a stand or decision?	appraise, argue, defend, judge, select, support, value, evaluate
<b>Creating:</b> can the student create new product or point of view?	assemble, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, write.

# UNDERSTANDING

- **What level of understanding do we and should we expect from our students?**
  
  - **What can/should we do as instructors to help promote this type of understanding?**
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# The Importance of Encouraging Critical Thinking Skills

- ✓ Focuses on *deeper level learning*
- ✓ Serves as a foundation for future course work
- ✓ Emphasizes objectivity and patience - essential to a liberal studies education
- ✓ Makes students aware of the complexities of good reasoning
- ✓ Translates into important workplace skills
- ✓ Practical benefit of better problem solving skills





# Role of the Faculty - Points to Make

- Critical thinking is a skill – you need to practice to become good at it!
- Leave emotions to the side.
- Be able to identify the position someone is taking, and the reasons why he/she is taking it.
- Avoid fallacies!
- Be able to identify the assumptions embedded in a person's reasons (including your own!).



# The 2 Step Process of Critical Thinking

*First understand, then evaluate*

## 1. Understand what is being said

- ✓ Tie in with active reading
- ✓ Use SQ3R to identify:
  - the thesis/conclusion
  - the reasons given for the conclusion (the argument)
  - summarize them in own words
- ✓ Leave emotions out of it!



# The 2 Step Process of Critical Thinking

## Step #2: Evaluate what is being said

Look for:

### ✓ Assumptions

- Something (a statement) that is taken for granted as true
- It also may be used to prove further propositions

### ✓ Inconsistencies

- Two claims are inconsistent when both cannot be true at the same time (but both could be false)

### ✓ Bias

### ✓ Other possible conclusions/implications

***\*We will focus on assumptions today!***



# Assumptions...

...are often embedded within reasons given for a position.

✓ An example:

1. Capital punishment is murder. (reason)
2. Therefore capital punishment should be illegal (conclusion)

***What assumptions create the claimed connection between #1 and #2?***

**Are these good assumptions to make? (leave emotions out!!)**



# Let's Practice some more!

- Identify the assumptions embedded in the following reason given for a position
  1. Animals are living beings (reason)
  2. Therefore, it is morally wrong to eat them (conclusion)

**What assumptions create the claimed connection between #1 and #2?**

**Are these good assumptions to make? Why/why not? (leave emotions out!)**



# More Practice!

## Applying Critical Thinking to 2 Video Clips:

*Step #1: Understand what is being said...*

✓ For each of the 2 videos:

Write down what reasons the person(s) in each video use to support the position given on same sex marriage?

[http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/06/16/new.york.gay.marriage.tyree/index.html?hpt=hp\\_bn1](http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/06/16/new.york.gay.marriage.tyree/index.html?hpt=hp_bn1)



# Applying Critical Thinking: Step #2 -Evaluate the Reasons/Arguments

What assumptions does the author make that lead her to her conclusion?



# Encouraging Critical Thinking Skills

## ✓ The Challenges

- Emotions rule
- Identifying the argument & reasons given for it
- Making irrelevant points/not maintaining focus on the actual argument
- Opinions, not justifications
- Lack of interest & relevance





# The Role of Instructors - Addressing the Challenges

1. Keep students focused on the argument/reasons –no opinions!
2. Help them understand what the argument is, and how to evaluate it without succumbing to the use of fallacies!
3. Find examples from current events to make things more interesting.



# Questions for you to consider:

How can I embed critical thinking (CT) into my TA assignment, classroom, teaching?

- More specifically, how will I embed CT into:
  - Your class (role as a TA/instructor) via
    - Course content
    - Class discussions
    - Assignments
    - Evaluation



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# Applying CT To YOUR Class

- Choose one class topic you will teach or have taught for one of your courses – write it down.
- Write down a question about a concept/material from this topic that corresponds to each level of learning.
- What class activities/types of teaching/learning activities can you use to best teach course content for each level? Why?
- How might you best evaluate students' knowledge for each level? Be specific. What types of test questions, activities, papers, etc. would you assign or use? Why?



# Other Resources

- **List of articles that discuss current event topics that I have used in class:**
  - “The Singer Solution to World Poverty,” by Peter Singer, *The New York Times Magazine*, September 5, 1999.
  - “Affirmative Action and Fairness,” by Robert K. Fullinwider, *Report from the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 10-13.
  - “In defense of Quotas,” by James Rachels, *Can Ethics Provide Answers?* from *Ethical Issues in Contemporary Society*, edited by John Howie and George Schedler, 1995.
  - “Is Racial Discrimination Arbitrary?” by Peter Singer, *Philosophia*, Vol. 8, No. 1, October 1978.
  - For a great collection of readings, try *The Right Thing to Do: Basic Readings in Moral Philosophy*, by James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2012.
- **Sources for a list of common informal fallacies:**
  - *Introduction to Logic* by Irving M. Copi.
  - *A Concise Introduction to Logic*, by Patrick J. Hurley.

