Below are announcements that instructors can use week by week to introduce students to each of the steps to critical thinking. Presented are the web version, but you are also able to download a MS Word Document version that you can copy and paste into your Learning Management System.

# ANNOUNCEMENT 1

### 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.

Over the next five weeks, we will examine and apply each step. To this end, we will work with the following tools:

1. [Critical Thinking Infographic](http://www.criticalthinkingandreasoning.org/infographic)
2. [Guide to Evaluating Critical Thinking](http://www.criticalthinkingandreasoning.org/evaluating-critical-thinking-1)

These steps will help lead you through the critical thinking process:

1. Describe the Issue
2. Define Positions
3. Evaluate Evidence
4. Compare Positions
5. Personal Position
6. Conclusions and Further Questions

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**Steps to Sound Reasoning: Step 1. Describe the Issue**

1. Briefly summarize the issue clearly and objectively.
2. Describe the main ideas or aspects of the issue.
3. Without judgment or bias, describe the issue and clarify its key elements.
4. What are the main ideas, events, definitions and concepts?
5. What factors influence this issue?

In this week's discussion boards we will focus on the first step in the critical thinking model, "Explanation of the Issue." Remember in the first few steps of Critical Thinking you want to withhold bias or judgement. Keep your mind open to all aspects of the issue.

1. Clarify the issue, as you understand it.
2. In your readings or research, what are the facts, circumstances, details, or factors that are critical to understanding the issue?
3. Take notes, draw, doodle, or in some way organize your ideas.
4. Reflect on your notes. Are you ready to describe the broader context that is relevant to this issue?
5. Now summarize the issue. What do readers “need to know” information for a solid understanding of the issue?

Again, here are the tools that will support you in critical thinking

* [Critical Thinking Infographic](http://www.criticalthinkingandreasoning.org/infographic)
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# ANNOUNCEMENT 2

### Critical Thinking Steps to Sound Reasoning: Step 2. Defining Positions

Objectively examine multiple positions, perspectives and beliefs. Include positions held by professionals and experts.

1. How is this issue understood by different people?
2. What are common assumptions and beliefs about the issue?
3. What do professionals and experts suggest? How do you know they are experts?

Now it is time to look at different understandings of the issue including who is engaged in the debate or discussion surrounding this issue and what they have to say.

1. Describe the experts who have weighed in on the issue.
2. Provide the names of other individuals or groups weighing in on the issue.  Briefly describe the communities or organizations they are with.
3. Now what are the positions of the public and other general perceptions of the issue?
4. As you take notes to organize your research, remember to include the authors and sources (practice your APA citation style!). In your notes, summarize the positions presented, along with your reflections, thoughts, or questions about these opinions.

Again, here are the tools that will support you in critical thinking

* [Critical Thinking Infographic](http://www.criticalthinkingandreasoning.org/infographic)
* [Guide to Evaluating Critical Thinking](http://www.criticalthinkingandreasoning.org/evaluating-critical-thinking-1)

And here are some additional resources to help you with your research:

* Ashford Writing Center. How to Research Secondary Sources
* Ashford Writing Center. Student Writing Standards

# ANNOUNCEMENT 3

### Critical Thinking Steps to Sound Reasoning: 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?

1. What evidence is relevant to the investigation of this issue?
2. What information and data justifies key points of view?
3. What information or positions do or do not stand up to scrutiny?
4. Now it is time to look at different responses to or interpretations of the issue and the key elements of it that you have summarized by examining the work of experts engaged in debate surrounding this issue.
5. What are the strengths of your evidence? What are the limitations of your evidence?
6. What evidence, information, or data contributes the most to understanding the issue? What evidence, information, or data is not as relevant?
7. How do you assess the quality of the evidence you are examining? How do you know your sources are credible?
8. Remember to keep filling out your notes. Expand on your observations, thoughts, and analysis based on your deepening evaluation of evidence.

Again, here are the tools that will support you in critical thinking

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# ANNOUNCEMENT 4

### Critical Thinking Steps to Sound Reasoning: Step 4. Comparing Positions

Every issue can be understood from the perspective of multiple positions or interpretations. It is time for you to make your final appraisals of the evidence you have examined thus far. As you weigh the evidence, think about which perspectives hold the greatest weight. Why?

1. How does assessing different perspectives on the issue affect your understanding of it? What position stands out as the most rational or meaningful? Why?
2. As you make decisions about what evidence to include in your final analysis, suspend personal bias when considering evidence that may contradict or challenge your initial ideas.
3. Even if an argument or position challenges your initial ideas, be sure to acknowledge its relevance and contribution to the debate about the issue.
4. Keep an open mind and be ready to accept changes in your initial ideas about the issue.

Again, here are the tools that will support you in critical thinking

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# ANNOUNCEMENT 5a

### Critical Thinking Steps to Sound Reasoning: Step 5. Personal Positions

It is time for you to find support for YOUR position. Remember that 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 you must be sure to back up your stance by providing examples (evidence) drawn from relevant, credible sources.

1. Has the evidence you have located, evaluated, and compared caused you to alter or refine your position? What is your final stance? How can you support it?
2. Be as rigorously specific as possible. Avoid vague, general, unspecific and factually deficient or inaccurate presentation of your ideas.
3. Demonstrate the SIGNIFICANCE of your examples. How or why are they relevant to the point you are trying to make.
4. Back up every broad generalization you make with detailed and specific information drawn from credible sources in order to substantiate your claims.
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?

Self-check: a clearly stated position is composed of main points supported by carefully developed and substantive examples drawn from credible sources.

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# ANNOUNCEMENT 5b

### Critical Thinking Steps to Sound Reasoning: Step 6. Personal Positions

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?

Again, here are the tools that will support you in critical thinking

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* [Guide to Evaluating Critical Thinking](http://www.criticalthinkingandreasoning.org/evaluating-critical-thinking-1)