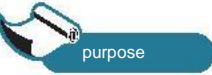








CRITICAL THINKING TOOLBOX

Icons	Critical Thinking Terms	Definitions	Writing Terms
 (Blueprints/plans)	Purpose	↔ What you want to say about your topic: the point(s) you are making. The purpose is the plan or blueprint for what you want to say in your essay.	Thesis statement
 (Support beams)	Ideas	↔ The foundation for your argument: Ideas develop your purpose. They form the structure of your overall sentences (beams), develop your thesis (plans) and hold up your conclusion.	Topic sentences
 (Nails)	Support	↔ Examples, details, evidence, illustrate the ideas you use to support your purpose. They provide support (nails) for the ideas (beams) that support your purpose.	Major and minor details
 (Wrench)	Assumptions and Biases	↔ Assumptions (information you take for granted) and biases (personal beliefs you have about particular topics) can be a helpful tool or they can throw a wrench into your thinking if they are not valid. Always evaluate them when making an argument.	
 (Finished house)	Conclusions	↔ The results of your argument or purpose. The result of carefully building your argument (using plans, beams, and nails) is a well-thought-out conclusion (house).	Conclusion
 (Goggles)	Point of View	↔ How you see the subject you are discussing.	
 (Magnifying glass)	Analysis	↔ Breaking down an idea and working out the meaning of the individual parts and how they relate to the whole: you look at the overall meaning and the connections between the parts.	

These critical thinking terms are essential to the critical thinking process, but they are also the tools of argument. In some ways, most college writing contains some level of argument: you always have a purpose to put forth to your readers.

Now read the following more detailed explanations of each of these terms and consider the questions related to them that you should ask yourself as you read and write in order to think more critically and analyze more thoroughly.



1. Purpose. When you write, your purpose—the point(s) you want to make—should be clear and consistent from the beginning to the end of your essay or paragraph. Everything you include should develop that purpose. This is the argument you put forth to your readers.

When you read, ask yourself:

What is the author's purpose for writing?

What argument(s) is the author putting forth?

What direct or implied questions is he or she

addressing?

When you write, ask yourself:

What is my purpose in this writing assignment?

What is my argument for this topic?

What conclusion(s) have I reached related to it?

How will I argue this conclusion or these conclusions?



2. Ideas and Information. You develop your purpose using your own ideas, personal knowledge, and information. Your ideas and background information are specific branches of the tree that forms your purpose—they expand upon it. Later, you develop these individual ideas, or branches, using examples, ideas, details, and commentary.

When you read, ask yourself:

What ideas does the author include to support his or her purpose?

What background information does he or she provide?



support

When you write, ask yourself:

What ideas do I want to include to support my purpose?

What background or personal information can I use to help develop the purpose?

3. **Support.** You need to provide information to support your purpose, ideas, and conclusions on a subject. You can draw on your personal experiences or those of others, use facts and statistics you have researched if your instructor allows research for the particular assignment you are working on, provide examples and specific details, or supply information provided by your instructor to support your reasoning. Always evaluate the information provided by other writers. Include commentary about the examples and details you provide.

When you read, ask yourself:

What evidence or examples is the author using to support his or her reasoning?

Are the examples and support believable and clearly explained?

Do they adequately support the author's purpose?

When you write, ask yourself:

What evidence or examples can I provide to back up my ideas?

Are they believable and clearly explained?

Do they support my purpose?



assumptions
biases

4. **Assumptions and Biases.** Be sure that the assumptions you or another author make about a topic or idea are not flawed or based on misinformation. Check for any errors in ideas resulting from an unfounded bias in your thinking process or that of an author. Any mistakes in the concepts or ideas that your reasoning is based on can cause problems in your argument. So, although assumptions and biases are helpful tools, they can throw a wrench in your thinking if they are unfounded.

When you read, ask yourself:

Is there an error in the idea the author is explaining?

Does the author include assumptions or biases that are flawed or unfair?

When you write, ask yourself:

Is there an error in the idea I'm explaining?

Are the assumptions I make or the biases I brought into thinking about my topic based on false information?



5. Conclusions, Implications, and Consequences. A conclusion is the final point in your argument, the place you reach after discussing the ideas that support your purpose, your argument. Consequences are the results of a point you have argued. Implications are more subtle: They are the possible results of an argument that you have inferred (or an author has implied). Be sure to look at all the possible consequences of your argument. For instance, if you argue that the music program should be cancelled at your school and the money should be used to add more parking spaces at your campus, be sure to address all the implications and consequences of canceling the music program. You need to be aware that you are implying that having more parking spaces is more important to your school than having a music program. The consequences could be a loss in the artistic identity of your school, fewer students who wanted to focus on music would apply to your college, and so on.

When you read, ask yourself:

What are the implications of the author's ideas in this reading?

Are the consequences of his or her arguments acceptable?

When you write, ask yourself:

What are the implications of my ideas in this paper?

Are the consequences of my ideas acceptable and clearly thought out?

Back to the domino idea again: Think of the concluding argument in your writing not as the last domino falling over in the chain, but as one near the end. The consequences of your argument are the last few dominoes that follow that one. They might not be directly stated in your paper: You'll have to imagine those last dominoes falling and what they mean. For instance,



point
of view

will the canceling of the music program lead to a decrease in enrollment and hurt the overall budget at the school and the quality of the education provided?

6. Point of View. Your point of view is your perspective on a topic. Be sure to check the assumptions your point of view is based upon and whether your point of view is unreasonably biased.

When you read, ask yourself:

What point of view does the author have on his or her topic?

Did he or she consider other points of view that might be relevant?

Is the point of view one-sided or biased?

When you write, ask yourself:

What is my point of view on the topic?

Have I considered other points of view that might be relevant?

Is my point of view too biased for my intended audience?



analysis

7. Analysis. Analysis involves breaking down an idea and working out the meaning of the individual parts and how they relate to the whole. It is an in-depth look at every detail of an idea or argument, like using a magnifying glass to examine something up close and carefully.

When you read, ask yourself:

What is the author saying?

Does the author develop his or her ideas well using specific ideas, support, and analysis?

When you write, ask yourself:

What am I saying, and how can I explain it?


Do I develop all the ideas well using specific ideas, support, and analysis?

Using the critical thinking tools for reading and writing will help you focus on the basic parts of your written arguments. With practice, these skills


will become an automatic and natural part of your reading and writing processes.

CRITICAL THINKING CHECKLIST

The critical thinking skills defined in this chapter can help you get into the habit of analyzing and evaluating the ideas and techniques you and other authors use to present arguments. Throughout this book, you will see critical thinking questions based on the concepts covered here. Be sure to use the general Critical Thinking Checklist below to evaluate your critical thinking process or the process of another writer.




CRITICAL THINKING CHECKLIST




purpose

1. What is the purpose of this piece of writing? Is it clear?




ideas

2. What ideas and background information are provided to support the purpose of this piece of writing?




support

3. What evidence and examples are used to explain and develop the ideas that support the argument made in this piece of writing? Are the evidence and examples provided sufficient?



assumptions
biases

4. Are there unfounded assumptions or unreasonable biases?



conclusions

5. Are all of the conclusions, implications, and consequences of the argument (the results of the argument taken to their furthest extreme) considered?



point
of view

6. Is the point of view clear and consistent, and have other points of view been considered?



analysis

7. Using these critical thinking tools, analyze the overall structure of this essay and the strength of the author's argument, ideas, and support. Was the author successful in accomplishing the purpose? Why or why not?

