

# Critical thinking or critical expression? Meeting students' critical needs

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## Preview

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1. What CT skills are needed?
2. What CT skills do students have already?
3. Does 'Critical Expression' more accurately describe what students need?
4. How can we deal with critical expression systematically?
5. What are some strategies to help our students' critical expression?

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## What's in the literature?

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- ELT literature:
  - not much!
- EAP methodology books:
  - recent ones only
- Mainstream education literature:
  - far more

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## Mainstream literature

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- ▣ Australian Qualification Framework, outcome of bachelor degree

*"cognitive and creative skills to exercise critical thinking and judgement in identifying and solving problems with intellectual independence"*

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## What is critical thinking?

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"The unbearable vagueness of critical thinking"

Vandermensbrugghe (2004)

*International Education Journal 5(3), 417-422*

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# thinking

effectively

life  
essence  
heart  
time  
implications  
however  
relevance  
way  
matter  
think  
well-suited  
dominate  
Ciao/Via? /  
dominate  
mostly  
leading  
books  
understandable

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Provisional definition:

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## What CT skills are needed?

### Prospectuses and brochures

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- Only very vaguely defined

*"Students are expected to assess and think critically about issues rather than simply repeat learned information. To do well, students will need to consult different sources of information and evaluate them from a critical perspective."*

University of Adelaide 2012 Postgraduate Coursework International Prospectus

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## Where are these from?

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- ▣ "If one takes no thought about what is distant, one will find sorrow near at hand"
- ▣ "There may be men who act without understanding why. I do not. To listen much, pick out the good and follow it; to see much and ponder it: this comes next to understanding."

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- ▣ "If I am walking with two other men, each of them will serve as my teacher. I will pick out the good points of the one and imitate them, and the bad points of the other and correct them in myself "
- ▣ "Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous"
- ▣ "When anger rises, think of the consequences"

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## Asking the students ...

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- ▣ 10 students, Egypt, Thailand, China, Turkey, Lebanon
- ▣ Qualitative:
  - survey (mostly open questions)
  - discussions
  - essays
- ▣ Questions separated thoughts from talk

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## Asking the students ...

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- ▣ All said either that they sometimes disagreed – in their own minds – with their teacher, OR that it's normal to sometimes disagree privately with a teacher
- ▣ Most indicated that disagreeing with teacher in own country was frowned upon

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## Asking the students ...

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- ▣ teacher might be wrong, but if he/she "is wrong, we can't speak, because this lead us to a hard punishment from the teacher"
- ▣ teachers are not always right – but stus "must agree with the ideas from their teachers sometimes, even though they know the ideas are wrong"

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## So it appears that ...

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- ▣ Many students do question academic authority and draw their own conclusions
- ▣ Some may expect negative consequences for doing this openly
- ▣ CT teaching thus could focus on:
  - When and where CT expression is valued
  - How to express CT in a way that is accepted

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## Why is 'Critical Expression' a useful concept?

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- ▣ May already be some critical thinking going on
- ▣ Pragmatic: allows a focus on end result
- ▣ Fits in with a traditional ESP/EAP needs analysis approach
- ▣ Relatively easy to explain to learners
- ▣ More concrete: we can 'see' expression; can't see thinking
- ▣ Ties in naturally with language education
- ▣ Doesn't sound political/ideological

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## Sub-skills of Critical Expression

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- ▣ Compiled from multiple sources
- ▣ Many not even labelled as CT
- ▣ They will be familiar!

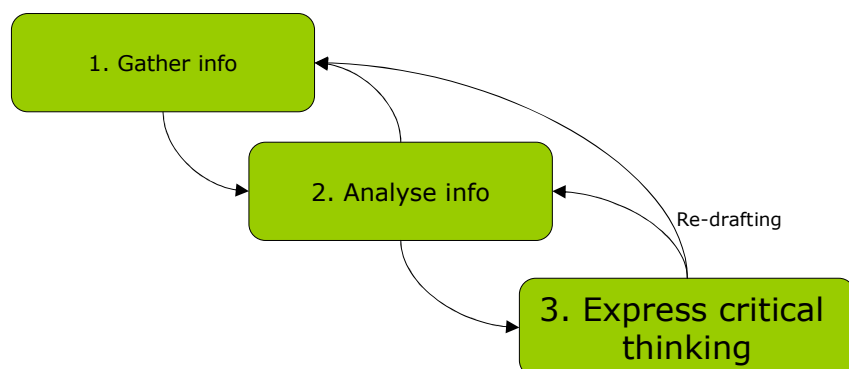
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## 3 stages of CT

1. Gather info
2. Analyse info
3. Express critical thinking

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## Reality is: they interact



1 and 2 are meaningless without understanding 3

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## Stage 1: Gathering information

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- ▣ Traditional comprehension
- ▣ Detecting / understanding / being sensitive to:
  - main ideas / supporting ideas
  - inference      degree of certainty
  - attitude      tone      emotion
  - purpose      fact or opinion
  
  - [relationships between ideas]
  - [digressions, anecdotes and asides]
  - [good/bad presentation of statistics]

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## Stage 2: Analysing information

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- 3 aspects:
- Relating to the text
  - Questioning the context
  - Questioning the text

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## Stage 2: Analysing information

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- Relating to the text
  - 'reaction' questions
  - evaluating the ideas
  - forming initial opinions
  - effect on own prior opinions

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## Stage 2, cont: Analysing information

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- Questioning the context
  - author affiliation / potential bias / ulterior motives / reason to influence
  - comparing with other texts
  - any important/obvious points not addressed?
  - ideas from others accurately represented?

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## Stage 2, cont: Analysing information

### □ Questioning the text

- quality of support
  - fact/opinion                      logical/valid reasoning
  - references?                      assumptions?
- conclusions drawn
  - appropriate from the evidence?
  - over-generalised?
  - only partially supported?

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## Stage 3: Critical expression

### □ Expressing critical thinking

- genre
  - example essays
  - discussion scripts
- lexical and/or functional approaches
  - useful chunks / functional language

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## 4 strategies (for now!)

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1. Start from where the students are
2. Show them where they're going
3. Habituate the questioning
4. Get students to do things with texts

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## 1. Start from where the students are

Bringing up previous thoughts about the topic.

Situation: Feeling pressure to conform (before reading psychology text about conformity).

**2.** *Think of a similar situation you have experienced. Discuss the questions in small groups. Try to use the key words.*

1. Describe the situation. What happened?
2. Describe the pressures you felt. What were they? How strong did they feel?
3. Did you try to resist the pressure? If so, how?
4. What did you do in the end?
5. How did you feel afterward?



Academic Connections 3, Unit 3

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## 1. Start from where the students are

Welcome to Academic Connections .....	vi
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<b>UNIT 2</b>	<b>Marketing:</b> New Ways to Spread the Message .....	21
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- Topic progression that moves students from the familiar to the more academic



Academic Connections 2

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## 2. Show them where they're going

### ▣ Marking guides



EAP Now! 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Appendix C

EXTENDED ESSAY ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET	
Student's name	Family _____ Given _____
Assignment title _____	
Class/Section _____	Date submitted _____
Date due _____	
I hereby declare that: (I) this work is entirely my own; (II) all sources used in the preparation of this assignment are fully referenced; (III) no part of this work has been submitted for assessment in any other course of study.	
Date: _____	Signature: _____
<b>ASSESSMENT:</b>	
<b>AREA</b>	<b>GRADE</b>
Overall argument	
Strong support	
Appropriate supporting evidence	
Key concepts and terms defined	
Evidence of extensive library research	
Oral presentation	
Academic appropriateness of language	
Full referencing list	
Vocabulary (size, range and variety)	
Structure of written report and writing	
General comments (provide as often as is necessary): _____ _____ _____	
Final grade	Teacher's signature: _____

Table 3. EAP Now! English for Academic Purposes Student's Guide

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## 2. Show them where they're going

### ▣ Examples (model essays, functional language, scripts)

**Big government: Too much tax**

General statement → 1 For the last hundred years or more, there has been a trend in many countries towards governments spending more money in ways designed not just to run the country, but to improve the lives of particular groups of people. These kinds of policies cause a number of problems that are detrimental to society as a whole.

Thesis statement → These kinds of policies cause an unfair tax burden on all people, not just those who benefit, and secondly that it removes incentives to work hard.

Preview/Scope → This essay will demonstrate some of these problems: it will show firstly that such 'big government' policies cause an unfair tax burden on all people, not just those who benefit, and secondly that it removes incentives to work hard.

Argument 1's topic → 2 It is important that the taxation system is fair and equitable. This means not only that people should all pay the same amount of tax, but also that they should benefit to the same extent from what the government's tax revenue is spent on. For some items of government expenditure, such as defence of the country, this isn't difficult: everyone benefits to the same extent. However, other areas are far more problematic. If child care is subsidised, for example, that means that people without children are paying for something that only benefits those who choose to have children. Similarly, subsidised services to assist the elderly would be paid for by people who don't use them. This is clearly unfair, and also means that tax becomes higher than it would be without the subsidies.

Supporting evidence for Argument 1 →

Optional paragraph conclusion →

Introduction

body



EAP Now! 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Unit 2

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## 2. Show them where they're going

Examples:  
functional  
language



EAP Now! 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, Unit 6

### Task B | Refuting, exemplifying, requesting further explanation and checking understanding

1 Write the bold words from the list of functions next to the appropriate useful expression.

#### Useful expressions

- \_\_\_\_\_ When you said that ..., did you mean that ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ You mentioned before that ... but what about ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ Do you mean that ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ But, if what you say is true, then ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ So you mean ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ I see. And I think some further evidence for that is ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ But, you said earlier that ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ I can see why you're saying that, because ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ If it's the case that ..., why can't ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ Well, I think we should also think about ...
- \_\_\_\_\_ Could you give me an example?

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## 3. Habituate the questioning

▣ 'reaction questions'

6. Work with a new partner. Discuss your reactions to the reading.

1. What new information did you learn from this text?
2. Which piece of information was most interesting to you? Why?
3. Where else might you read or hear about hypotheses, outside of biology lessons?



Academic Connections 2, Unit 1

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## 4. Get students to do things with texts

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- ▣ Go beyond comprehension and inference
- ▣ Compare texts treating things from different angles
- ▣ Ask them take on different roles and react to the text / they take different angles on same text

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## Summary

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- ▣ CT happens in everyday life
- ▣ There may be cultural differences in how and when/whether it is expressed
- ▣ Understanding **when and how CT is expressed** in the target culture will help learners
- ▣ Allowing **critical expression** to drive CT teaching has advantages

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## Continue the discussion at ...

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Pearson Tertiary Place website:

[www.pearsonlongman.com/tertiaryplace](http://www.pearsonlongman.com/tertiaryplace)

PEARSON

ALWAYS LEARNING

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## Acknowledgements

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