

CT Class Syllabus

The Key Concept of the Course

This course is entirely and exclusively concerned with the development of potential capacities that all of you have, even though you have not developed them, capacities in that part of your mind known as "your intellect". Most people don't develop their intellect and use it very ineffectively and often mainly to rationalize or justify their infantile or egocentric drives.

One way to put this point is to say that most people are not in charge of their ideas and thinking. Most of their ideas have come into their minds without their having thought about it. They unconsciously pick up what the people around them think. They unconsciously pick up what is on television or in the movies.

They unconsciously absorb ideas from the family they were raised in. They are the products, through and through, of forces they did not choose. They reflect those forces without understanding them. They are like puppets who don't know that they have strings being pulled.

To become a critical thinker is to reverse that process, by learning to practice skills that enable one to start to take charge of the ideas that run one's life. It is to think consciously and deliberately and skillfully in ways that transform oneself. It is to begin to remake one's own mind. It is to run for the first time one's inner workings and to understand the "system" one is running. It is to develop a mind that is analogous to the body of a person that is physically fit. It is like an excellent dancer who can perform any dance that can be choreographed. It is like a puppet that discovers the strings, and figures out how to gain control of the way they are pulled.

Whenever you are doing a task in or for the class, ask yourself, would an independent observer watching you closely conclude that you were engaged in "taking charge of your mind, of your ideas, of your thinking" or would such a person conclude that you were "merely going through the motions of formally doing an assignment", trying to get by with some rote memorized formula or procedure?

The General Plan

The class will focus on practice not on lecture. It will emphasize your figuring out things using your own mind, not memorizing what is in a textbook. On a typical class day, you will be in small groups practicing "disciplined" thinking. You will be regularly responsible for assessing your own work using criteria and standards discussed in class. If at any time in the semester you feel unsure about your "grade", you should request an assessment from the professor.

For every class day you will have a written assignment which involves "disciplined" thinking. Out of class you will enter disciplined reflections into in a journal, using a special format.

Requirements

All students must complete all of the following:

1. 25 short written assignments, one due for every class day. Each of these must be computer - generated - so that you can easily revise them. If your assignment for the day is not completed, then you are not prepared to do the "in-class" work of the day and you will be asked to leave.
2. 20 journal entries, all in a special format.
3. An oral exam. This is a mastery exam. All entries must be passed to pass the exam.
4. A final exam.
5. A Self-Evaluation, in which you "make a case" for receiving a particular grade using criteria provided in class and citing evidence from your work across the semester.
6. Consistent classroom attendance and active, skilled participation.

Grading

The class will not be graded on a curve. It is theoretically possible for the whole class to get an A or an F. You will not be competing against each other and there will be every incentive to help each other improve. No letter grades will be given before the final grade - unless you make a specific request to the professor. You should focus on improving your performance, increasing your strengths and diminishing your weaknesses, not in looking for a grade.

- Final Exam: about 30%
- Out of class writing: about 30%
- Self-evaluation: about 20%
- Active, Skilled Participation: about 10 %
- Journal: about 10%
- Penalty for Missed Classes: You may miss two classes without receiving any formal penalty (though it is clearly in your interest to attend every class and participate actively). Every two unexcused absences after the first two results in a 1/3 of a grade penalty (Hence, with four absences: if your final grade would have been C+, it would be reduced to a C; if C- it would be reduced to D+). Attendance is taken by way of "stamped in" class assignments.

Since the final grade is not based on points and is not mathematically calculated, the above percentages are approximations to suggest emphasis, not precise figures. In assigning your final grade the professor will lay all of your work out before him and match your work as a whole against the criteria passed out in class. You should read

and re-read these criteria many times through-out the semester to ensure that you are clear about what you are striving to achieve.

Vague Thinking

The "mortal sin" of the class is thinking that is vague, obscure, nebulous, blurred, confused, intangible, indefinite, imprecise, fuzzy, foggy, or indeterminate. If you learn nothing else in the class, learn to be clear, precise, definite, specific, concrete, distinct, and exact in what you say and write.

Reading Resource

There is a book available to serve as a background reader for the concepts of the course. Once in a while assignments may be made in it, but for the most part it will be used for readings that will help you learn some of the basic concepts implicit in the course. The book, *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World*, retails for \$30, but is being made available for \$15 only to registered members of the course. Books will be available for this price simply once in class. You will have to pay in cash or with a check made out to The Foundation For Critical Thinking. At the final exam you may sell the book back for \$8, making your cost for the semester only \$7.

Teaching Assistants

There will be some teaching assistants working with the professor, Richard Paul. These assistants do not assign grades, nor do they lecture. Instead, they help with tutorial work and are facilitators for in-class practice sessions when the professor is away on University work. They also administer the oral exam and conduct practice sessions when the professor is absent on official business. All class sessions are designed by the professor with specific goals in mind. There should be no relaxation of discipline and excellence of work when participating in a practice session conducted by the teaching assistants in the absence of the professor. Active, skilled participation in these sessions is just as important to your final grade as that of any other session.

{This article is adapted from the resource: *Critical Thinking Basic Theory and Instructional Structures*.}