

# Critical Thinking Class: Grading Policies

By Richard Paul

## The Goal of the Portfolio is to Amass Evidence of Critical Thinking Ability

"Evidence" is something that makes something else "evident". The key question is, "What specifically does your writing make evident?"

### FOR EXAMPLE:

When you write sentences that can be interpreted in many different ways, you make evident that you are thinking in a vague way.

When you do not give concrete examples and illustrations to make your point clear, you make evident that you do not know how to clarify your thought.

When you do not make clear-with appropriate transitional words and critical vocabulary-the logical relations between the sentences you write, you make evident that you are not thinking in terms of the logic of your thought, that you do not fully understand the structure of your own reasoning.

When you do not analyze key concepts and demonstrate how to lay bare the logic of them, you make evident that you are weak at conceptual analysis.

## The Weighting of Papers in the Portfolio

The semester will be divided into thirds. At the end of the course, to determine your grade on the portfolio, I will grade one paper randomly chosen from the first third, two from the second third, and three from the final third. At any point in the course you may turn in your portfolio for grade-level assessment. However, if you are routinely assessing your own work-as critical thinking requires, you should be able to recognize the level at which you are performing.

## What Each Grade Represents

### The Grade of F

Here are typical characteristics of the work of a student who receives an F. A close examination reveals:

The student does not understand the basic nature of critical thinking, and in any case does not display the critical thinking skills and abilities which are at the heart of this

course. The work at the end of the course is vague, imprecise, and unreasoned as it was in the beginning.

There is little evidence that the student is genuinely engaged in the task of taking charge of his or her thinking. Many assignments appear to have been done pro forma, the student simply going through the motions without really putting any significant effort into thinking his or her way through them.

Consequently, the student is not analyzing issues clearly, not formulating information clearly, not accurately distinguishing the relevant from the irrelevant, not identifying key questionable assumptions, not clarifying key concepts, not identifying relevant competing points of view, not reasoning carefully from clearly stated premises, or tracing implications and consequences.

The students work does not display discernable reasoning and problem-solving skills.

### **The Grade of D**

D level work shows only a minimal level of understanding of what critical thinking is, along with the development of some, but very little, critical thinking skills or abilities.

D work at the end of the course, on the whole, shows only occasional critical thinking skills, but frequent uncritical thinking. Most assignments are poorly done. There is little evidence that the student is "reasoning" through the assignment. Often the student seems to be merely going through the motions of the assignment, carrying out the form without getting into the spirit of it.

D work rarely shows any effort to take charge of ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. In general, D-level thinking lacks discipline and clarity.

In D-level work, the student rarely analyzes issues clearly and precisely, almost never formulates information clearly, rarely distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, rarely recognizes key questionable assumptions, almost never clarifies key concepts effectively, frequently fails to use language in keeping with educated usage, only rarely identifies relevant competing points of view, and almost never reasons carefully from clearly stated premises, or recognizes important implications and consequences.

D-level work does not show good reasoning and problem-solving skills and frequently displays poor reasoning and problem-solving skills.

### **The Grade of C**

C-level work illustrates some but inconsistent achievement in grasping what critical thinking is, along with the development of modest critical thinking skills or abilities.

C-level work at the end of the course, it is true, shows some emerging critical thinking skills, but also pronounced weaknesses as well. Though some assignments are reasonably well done, others are poorly done; or at best are mediocre.

There are more than occasional lapses in reasoning. Though critical thinking terms and distinctions are sometimes used effectively, sometimes they are used quite ineffectively.

Only on occasion does C-level work display a mind taking charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes. Only occasionally does C-level work display intellectual discipline and clarity.

The C-level student only occasionally analyzes issues clearly and precisely, formulates information clearly, distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, recognizes key questionable assumptions, clarifies key concepts effectively, uses language in keeping with educated usage, identifies relevant competing points of view, and reasons carefully from clearly stated premises, or recognizes important implications and consequences.

Sometimes the C-level student seems to be simply going through the motions of the assignment, carrying out the form without getting into the spirit of it. On the whole, C-level work shows only modest and inconsistent reasoning and problem-solving skills and sometimes displays weak reasoning and problem-solving skills.

### **The Grade of B**

B-level work represents demonstrable achievement in grasping what critical thinking is, along with the clear demonstration of a range of specific critical thinking skills or abilities.

B-level work at the end of the course is, on the whole, clear, precise, and well-reasoned, though with occasional lapses into weak reasoning. On the whole, critical thinking terms and distinctions are used effectively. The work demonstrates a mind beginning to take charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes.

The student often analyzes issues clearly and precisely, often formulates information clearly, usually distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, often recognizes key questionable assumptions, usually clarifies key concepts effectively, typically uses language in keeping with educated usage, frequently identifies relevant competing points of view, and shows a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, as well as noticeable sensitivity to important implications and consequences. B-level work displays good reasoning and problem-solving skills.

### **The Grade of A**

A-level work demonstrates real achievement in grasping what critical thinking is, along with the clear development of a range of specific critical thinking skills or abilities. The

work at the end of the course is, on the whole, clear, precise, and well-reasoned, though with occasional lapses into weak reasoning.

In A-level work, critical thinking terms and distinctions are used effectively. The work demonstrates a mind beginning to take charge of its own ideas, assumptions, inferences, and intellectual processes.

The A-level student often analyzes issues clearly and precisely, often formulates information clearly, usually distinguishes the relevant from the irrelevant, often recognizes key questionable assumptions, usually clarifies key concepts effectively, typically uses language in keeping with educated usage, frequently identifies relevant competing points of view, and shows a general tendency to reason carefully from clearly stated premises, as well as noticeable sensitivity to important implications and consequences.

A-level work displays excellent reasoning and problem-solving skills. The A student's work is consistently at a high level of intellectual excellence.

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