

CRITICAL THINKING [Non-formal logic] at AS/A2 LEVEL

EXAMINATION BOARD: OCR

WHY STUDY CRITICAL THINKING?

Reasoning well is a skill which is valuable to anyone who wants to understand and deal with the natural and social worlds. Scientists need to reason well in order to understand the causes of phenomena.

Politicians need to reason well (though they often don't) in order to adopt the right policies. But we cannot leave reasoning to the scientists and politicians because we all want to know whether what they tell us and what they prescribe for us is right. So reasoning well is an important skill for all of us.

Critical reasoning is centrally concerned with giving reasons for one's beliefs and actions, analysing and evaluating one's own and other people's reasoning, devising and constructing better reasoning.

Common to these activities are certain distinct skills, for example, recognising reasons and conclusions, recognising implicit assumptions, drawing conclusions, appraising evidence and evaluating statements, judging whether conclusions are warranted; and underlying all these skills is the ability to use language with clarity and discrimination.

In our society there are strong commitments to the value of [a] non-violent resolution of conflict - that it is better to reason and negotiate than to resort to violence, [b] toleration - based essentially on Mill's arguments in *On Liberty* about reasonable belief and behaviour, [c] democracy - that many issues/conflicts are best decided by reasoned discussion and informed voting.

The contribution that can be made by critical thinking in all these situations is crystal clear. This is all the more true if candidates learn to take seriously arguments and perspectives quite different from their own (a common requirement of skilful critical thinking in many cases where there is conflict).

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Critical Thinking is not subject specific. The specification involves the study of a range of very important transferable thinking skills. No prior knowledge is assumed or required. **What is required is intelligence, a curious mind and a fundamental respect for truth.**

SPECIFICATION

UNIT 1

AS: Introduction to Critical Thinking:

Written exam: 1 ½ hour written paper
75 marks - 50% of total AS GCE

UNIT 2:

AS: Assessing and Developing Argument:

Written exam: 1 ½ hour written paper
75 marks - 50% of total AS GCE

UNIT 3:

A2: Ethical Reasoning and Decision Making:

Written exam: 1 ½ hour written paper
60 marks - 25% of total Advanced GCE

UNIT 4:

A2: Critical Reasoning:

Written exam: 1 ½ hour written paper
60 marks - 25% of total Advanced GCE

Candidates must take Units 1 and 2 for the AS GCE award and all four units for the full Advanced GCE award.

There are two examination series each year: January and June. In 2009, only AS units will be assessed. From 2010, both AS units and A2 units will be assessed.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND CAREER CHOICES

The study of Critical Thinking is relevant to all other subject disciplines but is especially important for the Natural and Social Sciences, Philosophy, History and Law.

Because of its universal application Critical Thinking is relevant to all careers but is especially relevant to the 'thinking professions' (Law, Teaching/Lecturing, Scientific Research, Politics).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Students or parents requiring any further details are most welcome to contact Mr N Lambkin, Head of Philosophy and Logic.