

# Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

## CRITICAL THINKING

To read, write or think critically is a step-by-step procedure that is based on your ability to question the truth of an assertion, and to test the validity of the supporting evidence. Critical thinking processes, evaluates, accepts or refutes an argument, and constructs the most reasonable viewpoint.

### ◇ PROCESS:

Identify issue, conclusion, and supporting reasons.

**Issue:** the theme under discussion — can take the form of a title, a statement, a question or an introduction in which the speaker or author limits the focus of discussion.

**Conclusion:** clearly and specifically states the speaker's or author's position on the issue; may be either the first or last point of discussion, or the opening or closing sentence or paragraph. The conclusion or viewpoint is sometimes signaled by:

So,	In my opinion,	It shows that . . .
In Short,	It proves . . .	The truth is . . .
Therefore,	It is clear that . . .	We believe that . . .

**Supporting Reasons:** details that the speaker or author gives to convince audience of his or her position. Speaker or author will attempt to persuade by using denotative (literal) and connotative (suggested emotional) meanings.

### ◇ EVALUATE:

Determine truth of the conclusion by critically evaluating the validity of supporting reasons. Use inductive (specific to general), or deductive (general to specific) logic. Some evaluative inquiries should be made about:

**Generalizations:** are rarely true and are often introduced by excessive words.  
Ex.: all, everybody, always, (and contrasts) nobody, never, etc.

**Fallacy:** uses prejudices or passions instead of logical statements to undermine or support an argument. Uses false statements to lead to a potentially false conclusion.  
Ex.: "Your true voice" (AT&T) — suggests physical presence over telephone wires and the ability to be completely believable.

**Bias:** influences or affects unfairly. Watch or listen to language of author or speaker to determine if the argument is prejudiced to a particular point of view.  
Ex.: "They don't care about us." — comments may not be this obvious.

**continued on other side > >**

For more information, visit or call your nearest Rutgers Learning Center, or visit our website:<http://rlc.rutgers.edu>

Camden  
Armitage 231  
856/225-6442

College Ave  
Kreeger LRC  
732/932-1443

Cook/Douglass  
Loree 124  
732/932-1660

Livingston  
Tillett 111  
732/445-0986

Newark  
Conklin 126  
973/353-5608

◇ **ACCEPT OR REFUTE THE ARGUMENT:**

Agree or disagree with the main point by questioning and analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of each of the supporting reasons.

Look for the patterns used to organize the reasons. Does the writer or speaker give each reason equal weight? Does the writer or speaker give sufficient, verifiable proof for each reason?

Does the writer or speaker use “cause and effect” to demonstrate that an outcome is a result of prior events? Can the causes and effects be proven? Does the writer or speaker try to persuade the reader or listener by questionable means? (Examples include: appeals to emotions, “we vs. they,” body language, facial expressions, group affiliations). If each reason (premise) is valid and supports the conclusion, then the argument is sound.

If any of the premises (reasons) can be refuted, then analyze the remaining supporting reasons to determine if they are strong enough to carry the argument.

In your response, you should explain your findings, being careful to indicate why any or all of the reasons provided are either acceptable or unacceptable.

You should further demonstrate how the inadequate or erroneous reasons affect the argument overall.

◇ **CONSTRUCT THE MOST REASONABLE VIEWPOINT:**

Demonstrate critical thinking by eliminating conclusions which can't be supported. Remember to be flexible when considering people's belief systems.

Indicate your acceptance or rejection of the speaker's or writer's conclusion, and validate your decision by basing your reasons on the *existing* evidence only.

If the speaker or author has overlooked or reduced what is, in your opinion, an important premise, then you should mention the omission.

Reconstruct the argument to show how the speaker's or writer's conclusion has been distorted by the omission. Create a new conclusion based on the additional information. Check the accuracy of your own analysis by using the steps of the critical thinking procedure.

Your final viewpoint, your conclusion, should be clearly stated and should be supported by valid and verifiable reasons for your claim.