

CRITICAL REASONING

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Department: School of Public Policy
Central European University

Semester/term, year: Fall, 2019-20

Course Level: MA (elective)

No of Credits: 2 CEU credits

Course e-learning site: <https://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=10005>

Meeting time: Tuesdays 9:00-10:40, Budapest Campus

Office hours: In my office: N13, room 204. Hours TBA. Please go online to:
<http://simonrippon.youcanbook.me> to see current available times and reserve a slot

Course Description

This course teaches the general skills and knowledge needed to more clearly understand the arguments of others, and to make arguments of one's own. We will focus on developing critical ability in reading and written work. In particular, this course aims to develop the skills needed for (a) identifying, analysing, and clearly and charitably reconstructing the arguments of others; (b) identifying and avoiding common pitfalls in arguments; (c) writing clearly, precisely and persuasively; and (d) efficiently assessing different sources of evidence. Good critical thinking takes diligence and practice. For this reason, the classes will be practice-based and will operate on the assumption that the students have carried out the required weekly readings.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course students will:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the principles of critical thinking
- be able to take a reflective and critical approach to their own work and that of others
- be able to interpret, analyze and criticize complex texts and arguments
- be able to present a strong argument with precision and clarity

Requirements

For all students, whether registered to audit or taking the class for credit, the basic expectations are:

- (i) Regular, punctual attendance,
- (ii) Carefully completing the assigned readings before class, and
- (iii) Active participation in discussions and group exercises.
- (iv) At the beginning of each class, there will be a straightforward, multiple-choice knowledge quiz based on the assigned required readings. There will be NINE knowledge quizzes during the term, starting in week 2. You must

achieve a passing grade (60%) in SIX knowledge quizzes either to pass the course for credit, or to receive an audit grade for it on your transcript. It is not possible to pass a knowledge quiz if you are not present in class when it is held!

For the purpose of taking the knowledge quizzes, you should bring to each class a device on which you can access the internet (i.e., smartphone, tablet or laptop). Use of such devices in class is otherwise generally discouraged, and is only permitted for class-related purposes. If you do not own any such device you may still take the class, but please contact the instructor in good time to make alternative arrangements.

For students taking the class for credit, there will be the following assignments:

- 1) A 1 hour online critical reasoning test. Due date: **Monday 28th October 2018, Week 7 (7pm CET)**
- 2) A short critical analysis of a published text on the student's chosen essay topic for the final paper. The topic is to be agreed in advance with the instructor. (400-600 words). Due date: **Monday 11th November 2018, Week 9 (7pm CET)**
- 3) Presentation of a 1-page draft outline plan for the final paper. This assignment is intended help you to work out, logically organize, and concisely communicate the central points you intend to make in your final paper, and to provide an opportunity to discuss and think through potential objections and amendments. The outline should clearly state the intended thesis of the paper, and concisely present the main steps of your argument for it (bullet points are recommended!). Students may present and discuss their outlines either in class, time permitting, or in appointments with the instructor.
Due date: **Monday 25th November 2018, Week 11 (7pm CET)**
- 4) A 1,200 word final paper on the student's essay topic chosen earlier in the course.
Due date: **Monday 16th December 2018 (7pm CET)**

Assesment And Grading Criteria

Assessment

10% knowledge quizzes; 10% online critical reasoning test, 20% critical analysis, 20% draft outline plan, 40% final paper.

Participation in class will be taken into consideration, and may result in a 1/3 higher or lower grade for the class in borderline cases.

All course requirements must be completed in order to earn a grade for the class.

Grading critera for critical analyses

To earn a B+ grade or higher, the analysis must clearly and concisely describe the central argument or arguments of the published text which relates to the agreed

essay question. It must be presented in good academic English and be of appropriate length. The main assumptions and steps in the reasoning will be identified and explained with a reasonable degree of accuracy.

To earn an A-, the analysis must demonstrate the above qualities to a higher degree. Any omissions, or problems with your exposition or the argument, will be minor.

Answers that earn an A will be nearly flawless in writing style, organization, and exposition of the argument.

Grading criteria for draft outline plans

To earn a B+ grade or higher, the plan must clearly state the intended thesis of the paper, concisely present the main steps of your argument for it (bullet points are recommended!), and include a plausible response to any obvious, significant objections. It must be presented in good academic English and be of appropriate length.

To earn an A-, the outline plan must demonstrate the above qualities to a higher degree. Any omissions, unclarities, or problems with your argument will be minor.

Outline plans that earn an A will be concise, clear presentations of a thesis supported by a strong argument, including responses to potential objections. Flaws will be minor.

Grading criteria for final papers

Quantity:

Avoid going 10% over or under the required length. The word count should include all references and footnotes (if any), but exclude the bibliography.

Quality:

To earn a B+, the written assignment must meet the formal requirements, must clearly and concisely address the selected question, and must be written in good academic English. The paper must demonstrate a solid understanding of the arguments discussed. Important principles and concepts should be clearly explained. The views of others should, where necessary, be accurately, charitably, clearly and succinctly reconstructed, and properly cited with a bibliography. The assignment must show that you have analyzed and independently organized the material yourself in response to the question, rather than simply following the organization of in-class presentations or parts of the literature.

To earn an A-, the assignment must demonstrate all the above plus evidence of *genuine progress* as a result of your own independent thinking, such as your own substantive evaluation and critique of the validity and soundness of the arguments of others, or your own original positive argument. If there are any problems with the exposition or arguments in the assignment, these will be minor. Any obvious objections to your argument will have been anticipated and answered.

Assignments that earn an A will demonstrate all the above virtues, to the extent that they are nearly flawless in writing style, organization, exposition and soundness of arguments. While remaining entirely relevant to the question, an assignment that

earns an A will be relatively ambitious in scope and will demonstrate excellent academic writing and an exceptional degree of analytical rigour.

COURSE SCHEDULE AND WEEKLY READINGS

Wk	Topic	Reading
	A. IDENTIFYING ARGUMENTS	
1	Introduction	a. <i>Bowell and Kemp</i> , Chapter 1: Introducing Arguments b. <i>Bowell and Kemp</i> , Chapter 2: Section: Rhetorical Ploys
2	Types of argument	a. <i>Weston</i> , Chapter 3: Arguments by analogy b. <i>Weston</i> , Chapter 5: Arguments about Causes
3	Types of argument	a. <i>Weston</i> , Chapter 2: Generalizations b. <i>Weston</i> , Chapter 6: Deductive arguments For further reading, see <i>Bowell and Kemp</i> , Chapters 3 and 4 (non-mandatory)
4	Assumptions and Implications	a. <i>Thomson</i> , Chapter 1: Identifying Assumptions b. <i>Thomson</i> , Chapter 3: Recognising Implications
5	Flaws in Reasoning	a. <i>Bowell and Kemp</i> , Chapter 7: Pseudo-Reasoning
	B. RECONSTRUCTING ARGUMENTS	
6	Identifying and reconstructing arguments	<i>Bowell and Kemp</i> , Chapter 5: Argument Reconstruction
	Critical reasoning test (online)	
7	Barriers to argument evaluation	<i>Bowell and Kemp</i> , Chapter 6: Issues in argument-assessment
8	Critical Reasoning Lab	No reading. Review your full critical reasoning test results in advance of class!
	Critical analysis	
	C. MAKING A GOOD ARGUMENT	
9	Research	a. <i>Cottrell</i> , Chapter 9: Critical reading and note-making b. <i>Weston</i> , Chapter 4: Sources
10	Writing I	a. <i>Weston</i> , Chapter 1: Short Arguments, Some General Rules b. <i>Weston</i> , Chapter 7: Extended Arguments
	1-page draft outline plan for the final paper	
11	Writing II	a. <i>Weston</i> , Chapter 8: Argumentative Essays b. <i>Cottrell</i> , Chapter 10: Critical, analytical writing
12	Debate and Revision	Student essay plans*
	Final paper	

*In this session students will discuss their essay plans and defend their arguments with their peers. These plans will have been distributed a week in advance of the session.

Resources

Copies of the required reading will be made available on the CEU learning site.

Bowell, T. and Kemp, G. (2010) *Critical Thinking: A Concise Guide* (3rd Edition) London: Routledge.

Cottrell, S. (2005) *Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke

Thomson, A. (2009) *Critical Reasoning: A Practical Introduction* (3rd Edition) London: Routledge

Weston, A. (2008) *A Rulebook for Arguments* (4th Edition) Hackett Student Handbooks, United States of America: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.

Suggested essay questions

Students are encouraged to formulate their own critical essay questions on a topic of their choice. The following should be taken as a guide rather than exhaustive list. Students are free to choose any topic, but **should offer their own original argument, and must not repeat any work that has been, or will be, assessed in other courses.**

Current Affairs

- Does North Korea have a moral right to nuclear weapons for self-defence purposes?
- Is it morally acceptable for Russia to interfere in a US election?
- Should the power of presidential pardon be limited?
- Should Twitter and Facebook have discretion not to permit certain content?

Economic Justice

- Should businesses be required to provide child-care services?
- Are sweatshops morally permissible?
- Do wealthy nations have obligations to poorer nations?
- Should we use taxation to redistribute wealth?
- Are the 1% too rich?

Environmental Ethics

- Is flying immoral?
- Should production of petrol and diesel vehicles be prohibited?
- Should recycling be mandatory?

Sexuality and Reproduction

- Should same-sex marriage be recognized?
- Is it permissible to deny homosexuals the opportunity to adopt?
- Should governments opposed to birth control or abortion be required to permit them?
- Should governments support abstinence programs?

War, Terrorism and Humanitarian Intervention

- Should rights ever be curtailed in times of war?
- Can terrorism ever be morally justified?
- Is unwanted humanitarian intervention ever permissible?

Government

- Can a first-past-the-post electoral system be democratic?
- Is a world government desirable?