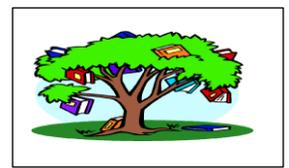


Toward Better Literacy: Reference Outlines



Critical Thinking and Argumentation

In everyday conversation, the word "critical" has a somewhat negative meaning attached to it. *Critical thinking*, however, is an extremely valuable skill for school, work, and life in general. It's all about thinking *like a scientist*. **Question everything and pay attention to detail.**

Whenever you encounter new information, whether it is presented as **fact** (verifiable and objective) or **opinion** (personal and subjective), ask a few questions:

- ❖ What are my **existing beliefs** and opinions on this? What are they based on?
- ❖ What is the **source** of this information? Is it trustworthy? Is there bias or agenda?
- ❖ Is there evidence of slanted, emotional, or otherwise **manipulative** language?
- ❖ Are there **other views** or interpretations that may be equally valid?

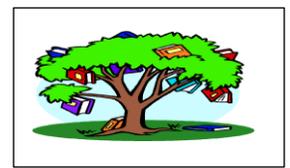
All of these can be condensed into a single question: *Why should I believe this?*

To build a persuasive argument, writers try to appeal to the reader's *emotions* (**pathos**), convince the reader to trust some *authority* (**ethos**), and/or use logical *reasoning* (**logos**).

When evaluating an argument, look out for **fallacies** (illogical reasoning):

- **Slanted Language:** Influencing the reader through words with strong connotations.
- **Emotional Appeal:** Appealing to fear, tradition, or pity; "tugging at the heartstrings."
- **Red Herring, Distraction:** Sidetracking by bringing up unrelated issues.
- **Ad Hominem:** Attacking the person rather than dealing with the issue.
- **False Authority:** Citing an "expert" who has no claim to expertise.
- **Bandwagon, Ad Populum:** Everyone else is doing it, so it must be right.
- **Genetic Fallacy:** The origins of a person or idea determine its worth.
- **Either-Or, False Dilemma:** Oversimplifying an argument by reducing it to just two sides.
- **False Analogy:** Claiming two items are alike when they are actually different.
- **Moral Equivalence:** Comparing minor misdeeds with major atrocities.
- **Hasty Generalization:** Rushing to a conclusion without adequate evidence.
- **Circular, Begging the Question:** The point to be asserted is already included in the premise.
- **Irrelevant Argument, Non Sequitur:** The conclusion does not follow from the premise.
- **False Cause, Post Hoc Ergo Propter Hoc:** One event leads to another when loosely or coincidentally related; if *A* followed *B*, then *B* must have caused *A*.
- **Slippery Slope:** Some event *A* will lead to *B*, which will lead to *C*, and so on until some bad event *Z* happens. Therefore, *A* must be prevented.

Toward Better Literacy: Reference Outlines

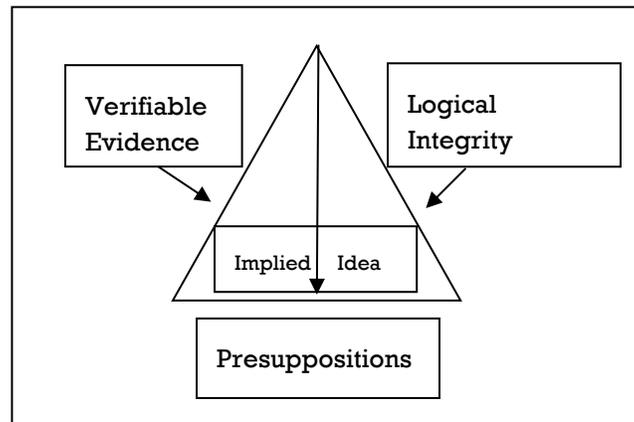


A Model for Critical Thinking

To think critically is to be:

- ✚ Knowledgeable of one's own presuppositions or beliefs
- ✚ Responsible with evidence
- ✚ Obedient to the rules of logic
- ✚ Willing to challenge established notions
- ✚ Open to changing one's views
- ✚ Critical thinking is a tool used to dialogue and grow in a learning community.

The Model



How to use the model

- ❖ Everyone has basic beliefs and presuppositions
 - The Socratic method may help to discover these, but questions can be leading
- ❖ When asserting a position, know your own foundational presuppositions and seek to know others
- ❖ Logical integrity depends on principles “extra nos” (outside of ourselves)
- ❖ Handle evidence with appropriate methods and logic that is free of fallacy
- ❖ The wording is on the surface. We must “arrive” at the implied idea within.
- ❖ As the evidence is presented logically, we move up the pyramid as the argument gets more refined
- ❖ Citing evidence and being true to logic and method, the more plausible the assertion
- ❖ Never change a belief if the evidence or logic is questionable
- ❖ When we discern the implied idea, we can discern the undergirding presupposition.
- ❖ Then we must decide to accept this, or “jump ship”