



AS/A2 CRITICAL THINKING

Teacher In Charge – Mr A.M. Krasnopolski

EXAMINATION BOARD: OCR

Critical Thinking is about learning how to think, reason and write in a coherent and logical way. The course is about developing a skill that is useful throughout life. It was first developed for use in prisons in Essex and had a life-changing effect on some of the young offenders because it helped them to see their actions more clearly. The A level course is primarily a practical course, designed to get you thinking about the meaning of information. In daily life we are bombarded with information through newspapers, radio, television, film, the internet, school textbooks, teachers, parents. Often it's difficult to know what point of view is reliable. Just how do we know when a piece of information is correct? What assumptions are being made? What is a reasonable argument? By studying Critical Thinking you will learn how to identify arguments, weigh up the strength of these arguments and spot flaws. You will learn how to apply these skills to oral arguments by showing that your case is better than someone else's. These skills are great for budding lawyers, journalists, writers and politicians. As you become clearer in your own thinking your confidence will increase, and studies have found that performance in all subjects improves. If you learn nothing else, it will be how to spot a lousy argument when you are chatting in the sixth form café with your friends!

Critical Thinking will also enhance your ability to write clearly argued responses. The course combines well with any subject and its main benefit is that it really gets you thinking about what you want to say and how to say it in the most dynamic and powerfully reasoned way. Dazzle your peers at A Level and beyond!

THE IDEAL CRITICAL THINKING STUDENT:

- Is unwilling to accept anything without thinking about it.
- Has an open mind and a sense of humour.
- Enjoys argument and likes to consider the hidden implications and assumptions behind points of view.
- Is interested in the credibility of sources of evidence.
- Is prepared to work independently and practise the skills learned.

The course provides you with a set of academic tools. It is highly valued by universities looking for students who can write persuasively and put forward logical arguments.

Critical Thinking is a considerable mental challenge, but without the burdens of heavy coursework or facts to learn. In short, it's about learning how you think!

HOW MANY LESSONS A WEEK?

One hour a week covers the course at AS. At A2 there are two lessons a week.

WHAT KIND OF TOPICS WILL WE DISCUSS?

The course uses authentic material - that is real arguments published in newspapers, journals, or on websites. We will therefore be looking at what people actually think and how they express their ideas. The material is varied and most importantly *relevant*. For example, you might be asked what you think of an argument suggesting that the first moon landing was a hoax. You might be asked to question the accounts of the shooting of the Brazilian man on the London Underground. You could look at assumptions in food or drugs labelling, advertising or other promotional literature. You won't find the course easy, especially at first, but it's definitely fun, and once you start you might even find it addictive.

HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED?

The course is examined at AS and A2. At AS there are two written papers. Introduction to Critical Thinking is taken in January. The second paper, Assessing and Developing Argument is taken in the summer.

At A2 there are two papers, Ethical Reasoning and Decision-Making, and Critical Reasoning. Both papers are taken in the summer.

Each paper at AS and A2 lasts for 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Critical Thinking is the kind of skill that improves with practice. Getting really good means *lots* of practice. Just think of it like learning to drive, difficult at the beginning, but gradually changing gear, reversing round corners and three-point turns become automatic! Any more questions on Critical Thinking (or driving!) can be directed to your teacher. For further information and specimen questions have a look at the OCR website. www.ocr.org.uk