



A level Critical Thinking

Who is this course for?

This course is for anyone who would like to improve their ability to think logically. It is for anyone who wants to learn to reason and debate more clearly, convincingly, and accurately. It's for those who want to think for themselves, and to avoid the many pitfalls that lead to poor arguments. Humans are supposed to be the best reasoners on the planet. Critical thinking will make you even better.

What are the entry criteria?

To enrol on this course you will normally need an average GCSE grade of B or above (i.e. an average score of 6.0), including a C in both Maths and English Language.

The Critical Thinking department at Wyke Sixth Form College

Critical Thinking is taught by Noel Stewart, who is also head of department. In addition, he is a Principal Examiner for critical thinking at the AQA exam board, and as such, is responsible for setting one of the papers which the students will sit, as well as training the examiners who will be doing the marking of this paper. This is, to say the least, a useful resource for students taking critical thinking at Wyke.

Exam Board

AQA

Course Details

AS Unit 1...This introduces you to the basic ground rules of arguing a case. What is an argument? How do you spot one in a text? Is it a good or a bad argument? How can you tell?

EXAMPLE: Is the following a valid argument?

Premise: Snow is orange.

Conclusion: Therefore, snow is orange or America does not exist.

ANSWER: Yes, surprisingly, the conclusion does follow from the premise, so this is valid.

AS Unit 2... This unit deals with arguments based on information in the form of facts and figures, for example, basic graphs and percentages. These can be mishandled and used to mislead, hence the famous saying, "There are lies, damned lies, and statistics."

EXAMPLE: "My religion is the fastest growing one in the world. It increased by 100% in the last 5 minutes!"

Sounds impressive – until you find out that it consists of just me, and a mug I converted 5 minutes ago.

A2 Unit 3... This covers reasoning about conflicting theories, claims, and rival explanations.

EXAMPLE: How would you go about testing the evidence for UFOs? How would you argue for or against this belief?

A2 Unit 4... This unit deals with how reasoning is used to help make decisions, and form policies.

EXAMPLE: Topics in past papers have included, "Should drugs be legalised?"

"Where should we draw the line between censorship and freedom of expression?"

Assessment is by exam only. There is no coursework.

How the course is delivered

This is a unique course for two reasons:

1. There are only **TWO** lessons per week.
2. In your first year it is taken as a **FIFTH** subject in addition to your other four AS subjects.

Classes will have the one teacher (Noel Stewart) throughout the year.

We study reasoning in a wide variety of contexts such as, movies, sitcoms, newspaper articles, books, the internet, and in class debates and discussions.

Departmental Enrichment

Students will get the chance to be part of the college debate team; to prepare for, and participate in, the annual inter-college debating competition. This is between 14 colleges from the north of England, and involves debating several controversial topics chosen by the colleges themselves. Students have found this a very enjoyable and rewarding experience.

Student Success

We had a 90% pass rate at AS last year along with 100% pass rate at A2.

For example, Marc Pitson, one of last year's A2 students needed a D grade in order to study Theology at university, which is where he is now, fulfilling his vocation to be a minister.

What does this course lead to?

Critical Thinking is not specific to any particular career path or university course, since good reasoning ability is necessary for all courses and career paths. Past students have gone on to study subjects such as sociology, philosophy, theology, politics, psychiatric nursing, and so on. It is also of value in improving your performance in your other A level subjects, as using clear, logical analysis will strengthen the content of most any essay in say, psychology, sociology, or history.

What can I do now that would help prepare me for this course?

Nothing – because in a sense, you've been preparing for this course all your life. Every time you've disagreed with someone, or wondered what to do next, or engaged in a discussion, or wrote an essay, you've been doing critical thinking. You didn't know it, but that's what you were doing. You just weren't doing it as well as you'll do it after you've been on this course.

Meanwhile, try this logic puzzle.

There were three convicts. The first had normal vision. The second also had normal vision but was one-eyed. The third was blind.

Their jailor had three white hats and two red hats. He selected three of these and put them on the convicts' heads. They couldn't see their own hats but could see the hats of the others. The jailor then said that he'd free the man who could tell the colour of his own hat.

The first looked at the other two's hats and said he couldn't tell.

The second heard the first one's answer and, having looked at the other two's hats, was also unable to tell.

The blind man, having heard the other two, was able to tell. What colour was it?