

Becoming a Critical Thinker, Canadian Edition (Diestler/Mahy)

Chapter I: Foundations of Arguments

1. Goals of this chapter

Chapter 1 contains the foundation for understanding for the rest of the text. Students should finish this chapter with a clear understanding that:

- a) There are basic critical thinking skills that are essential to the process of individual and group decision-making about personal, social, professional, national, and international issues. These basic skills are listed on page 2 and covered throughout the text.
- b) An argument consists of three parts: the issue under discussion, the conclusions (positions, stands) that are taken on the issue, and the reasons that support the conclusion.

Note: The word conclusion is used differently in formal logic, essay and speech writing, and argumentation. Most people who teach argumentation use our definition. It helps to clarify the difference for students who may be given different definitions in other courses.

- c) The term “argument” has two pertinent connotations: one – as it relates directly to critical thinking – is the structure of an issue under discussion; the second is the more commonly understood definition, meaning to quarrel or fight. The ideal goal of an argument is to achieve greater understanding of issues based on solid information. Decisions about policies are then made more thoughtfully and skillfully. Some of the misconceptions about argument are presented on pages 3 and 4.
- d) An argument is often presented as a conclusion followed by reasoning. Decisions, on the other hand, are often made by considering reasons first and then coming to conclusions. The on-line dialogue on pages 11 and 12 illustrates this principle. There is also an extensive discussion of decision-making following

the dialogue that goes into depth about the process of weighing alternatives.

2. Using exercises from the text

All of the exercises from this chapter can be done in class or assigned as homework. Discussing the editorials and articles from this chapter in class allows students to engage with the material and allows instructors to tailor the information specifically to their classes.

Foundational Exercises

Group/Pair Exercise:

Students can be put in groups (four is an ideal number for a classroom group) and asked to isolate the issue, conclusions, and reasons given in the editorials and articles. Then they can choose a spokesperson to discuss their findings with the larger class. If there are disagreements with another group's findings, these can be discussed and clarified by the instructor. (See Exercise 1.3 on pages 17-19 that uses a number of editorials, articles, and one advertisement to give students practice in finding issues, conclusions, and reasons.)

Class Feedback/Follow-up Exercise:

As a class, students should be encouraged to follow the reasoning and the conclusions of the arguments they have read. After discussing the reasoning and the conclusions, students can say whether they thought some important reasons were left out. The class should be encouraged to explore the reasons why some reasons may have been left out or ignored by the authors.

These exercises provide a good opportunity for the instructor to emphasize the need to support arguments with credible and relevant reasons. It is also a good time to emphasize that arguments are part of our daily lives – in the personal and social arenas, in sports and politics, and at work. Clarifying our different opinions is an important human pursuit.

Exercises 1.1 and 1.2 are useful in giving students practice so that they may easily locate issues and conclusions.

Individual Exercises/Assignments:

- a) The exercise on decision-making (page 15) might be used as a good extra-credit assignment. If students find that using the structure of argument has helped them come to decisions about personal matters, they may be willing to share the results with the class and thus show the relevance of basic argumentation principles.
- b) The exercise on humour in argument (page 15) is also relevant and enjoyable for students and encourages them to see the “argument” that is made in many comic monologues.

Speaking/Presentation Exercise:

The brief speech exercise at the end of the chapter (#1 on page 22) is a great way to develop a friendly class atmosphere and teach the structure of argument clearly. You might first brainstorm a list of controversial topics and list these on the board. Students then come up, one at a time, and take a stand on a topic. After expressing their conclusion, they give several reasons to support it.

To further reinforce the three parts of an argument, you can have the rest of the class list them as each person speaks. Then, call on students to summarize what they just heard. If the summary doesn't agree with what the speaker said, discuss the area of misunderstanding. Emphasize the need to hear someone's position before agreeing or disagreeing with it.

This exercise can also be used as an impromptu speech; have students write down controversial topics on 3x5 cards and collect the cards. Tell students to write examples from all areas of life. Have a variety of examples, such as:

- Should we have a flat tax rate?
- Who will win the Stanley Cup this year?
- Should salespeople be required to thank customers after a purchase?

- Should there be a license to become a parent?

A variety of topics will emphasize the universality of argumentation. Some students are not as well informed about social and political issues so this exercise will help them gain more confidence in their ability to be an informed advocate (since the structure of argument holds true across the content of issues).

When a student is ready to speak, he or she comes to the front of the class, picks three cards from the pile, and chooses one on which to make this speech (usually a two to five minute speech). This format is fun and exciting for students and demonstrates how quickly we can think of reasons for our positions.

Global Village Box Exercises:

The Questions for Discussion are intended for *group* discussion and to develop the students' ability to see issues and arguments as part of their daily lives. Instructors may choose to use the Global Village questions as a consolidation exercise to end the chapter. In addition, instructors may use the Global Village to introduce an individual journaling activity that allows students to build their own arguments and discuss the current issue.

- a) Chapter 1 Journal Activity: Find an article which discusses a current issue relating to green technology. Isolate the issue, conclusion and supporting reasoning.

3. **Supplemental lecture and exercise ideas**

In addition to the articles and editorials provided in the text, many instructors find it helpful to bring in editorials on current issues.

- a) Several newspapers and magazines can be brought in and different student groups can locate issues, conclusions, and reasons. If your students have access to the Internet during class time, they can find editorials there. The editorial pages are always good for this exercise, but sports pages, advice columns (e.g., Dear Ellie), articles on business, and advertising copy are also fruitful sources of fun and enlightening examination of arguments. Students often

find sports, advice columns and advertisements initially less intimidating sources than editorials. This type of exercise can be delivered as a lecture-discussion, or students can analyze the arguments in groups.

- b) Another interesting exercise, which can be used throughout the semester, is to have students bring in some of their "junk" mail. Analyze the ways the writers of the mail get the reader's attention and make their case.
- c) If there is an important local trial going on, you might follow the arguments of the crown and the defense as a class. The relevance of the structure of argument can also be understood if you can get a local trial lawyer to come and talk to the class about interesting cases.
- d) Television and radio also provide wonderful examples of argumentation. News commentary programs (e.g. *The Agenda with Steve Paikin*, *The CBC News – Panelist Discussions*) and talk shows are very stimulating. You can watch or listen to a live program or tape a show.
- e) People who work on elections or campaigns to pass special measures and propositions are often willing to come and speak to a class about their candidates and issues. Students can then analyze the pros and cons of their arguments with you. This process will help them as voters and citizens.
- f) If your campus has a debate team, you might want to ask debaters to present a debate in class and to discuss the process of researching and organizing their arguments.
- g) Ask the Student Association to send a representative to talk to the class about the current issues that the Student Association is facing.

4. Films for Analysis and Discussion

Films, plays, and television programs are all rich sources that illustrate the concepts in this text. For Chapter 1, you might view the films described below and write about the issues, conclusions, and reasons found in any one of these story lines. In addition, characters often

face and struggle with decision making.

Following are some suggestions for films that illustrate some of the points in Chapter 1. Several deal with important issues and life-changing decisions that are made by the characters.

North Country (2005, R).

Sexual harassment might be the legal name for the struggle that Charlize Theron's character, Josey, goes through in *North Country*, but her fight is about the human right to be treated with respect. After a string of low-paying jobs and abusive relationships, Josey, a single-mother of two, finds work in the male-dominated iron mines. At first, the job is seen as a golden ticket to independence and solid provision for her children, but, as time passes, the mines become a cruel and dangerous place for Josey and her female co-workers. Instead of taking the easy way out and quitting, Josey sets out for the fight of her life, turning many of her friends and family against her in the process. Much like Jonathan Demme's *Philadelphia*, this film is an uncompromising look at what can happen when you take a stand for what is right, regardless of the personal cost and obstacles in the way.

Similar Films and Classics:

Akeelah and the Bee (2006, PG).

Eleven-year-old Akeelah is just discovering her gifts and talents, and deciding on the identity she wishes to portray to her middle school classmates. She needs to decide whether to take the hard road of spelling bee competition and whether to agree to the demands of her new mentor. Her mother also has to make decisions about whether to let Akeelah spend time on her spelling that takes her away from obligations at home and at school.

Pursuit of Happyness (2006, PG 13).

This film is based on the story of Chris Gardner, a salesman struggling to make a living, while his wife works double shifts and his son stays in extended daycare. Chris needs to make decisions about whether to take an internship as a stockbroker, despite his time-consuming sales job. His wife has to decide whether to remain in the marriage, and both need to make decisions concerning the well-being of their son.

Good Night and Good Luck (2005, R).

In this film about the McCarthy era of the 1950s, CBS journalist Edward R. Murrow uses his talk show to make arguments against Senator McCarthy and his controversial approach to the threat

of communism.

Baby Boom (1987, PG).

In this film, a successful businesswoman has to decide whether to accept responsibility for a baby left in her care, whether to continue working and living in New York City, and eventually, whether to sell her own business for a very large profit. Each decision she makes leads to new choices and dilemmas.

Test Questions

(Note to instructors: The tests at the back of this manual can be reproduced and/or modified for use in your courses.)

Short Answer

1-4. Define the terms *issue* and *conclusion*, using examples for each.

The issue is the question that is being addressed. (page 5)

Example: Should air traffic controllers be given periodic drug tests? Or "The issue is whether the minimum wage should be raised." (Students can use examples from the text, like this one, or they can use their own examples.) Encourage students to state the issue using both styles.

The conclusion is the position taken about an issue. (page 7) Example: I believe that daily exercise is necessary to maintaining good health. .

5. What is one benefit of learning critical thinking skills?

Critical thinking helps us to evaluate reasoning and make decisions as citizens and consumers and as people in personal relationships. (pages 2-3)

6-7. Give a brief summary of one of the opinion articles used in class. Be sure to include the issue, the reasoning and the conclusion in your answers. (Answers will vary according to your choice of material/articles.

8. What function do the reasons play in an argument?

Reasons provide support for the conclusion in an argument. They provide the evidence that justifies the conclusion. (page 10)

9-10. State one of the conclusions that were in the articles or editorials at the end of the chapter.

From "Educational Ticket": Bicyclists should obey the same traffic laws as motorists. (page 18)

From: "War on Drugs Fails: We Need New Approach": The answer to our national drug problem is to legalize marijuana and to register addicts. (page 18)

From: "Drugged Driving": Driving under the influence of drugs is as dangerous as drunk driving. (page 18-19)

(Note to instructors: There are several other articles at the end of the chapter. The exact phrasing of the conclusion is not important--a correct answer focuses on the position taken by the writer of the editorial or article.)

11. What is a critical thinker?

A critical thinker is someone who uses specific criteria to evaluate reasoning, form positions, and make decisions. (page 2) (Note to instructors: You may have a revised definition for purposes of your course, or you may want to revise the question to fit your students, e.g. "Why is critical thinking important to reading, nursing, administration of justice, and so on?")

12-13. A billboard proclaims, "Wash with White-out. Clean up now!" Is this an argument? Why or why not?

This billboard proclamation is a statement, but not an argument because it has only the issue (implied) and conclusion, but no reasons are given to support the conclusion.

14. Everyone has a right to his or her opinion. The right to think freely is prized by our culture. However, as critical thinkers, we can see some opinions as carrying greater weight than others. Give an example of an opinion you value highly and state why you value this conclusion more than others.

The value of a conclusion is based on the substance of the reasons given: the substance is determined by the quality of the evidence given to support the conclusion. . Everyone has a right to an opinion, but if people have no evidence to justify their

opinions, their arguments are considered weak.

15. For the following short readings, list the issue, conclusion, and as many reasons as you can find. Each issue is 1 point, each conclusion is 1 point, and each reason is 1 point. Make sure the conclusions and reasons are in the material presented; don't add your own.

- a) Canada is losing many of its brightest students to the United States. However, according to Zhao, Drew and Murray (2000), many young new immigrants to Canada are also highly educated. Although, some young Canadians are leaving to pursue careers in the United States, Canada is not experiencing a 'brain drain'; in fact, more young and talented people are immigrating from developing countries everyday and thus Canada is in fact experiencing a 'brain gain'.

Issue: Is Canada losing its young talent and expertise?

Conclusion: No.

Reasons: More young and talented people are immigrating from developing countries – resulting in a 'brain gain'. Only some young Canadians leave to pursue careers in the United States.

- b) Magic Soda is the new green alternative to whiter whites. In a comparison test conducted in a third-party laboratory, Magic Soda was identified as 'making clothes whiter' than three other national brands. Eco-cert, the organization that certifies products, has stated that Magic Soda has no phosphates or harmful toxins. Now, your family can be green and clean! Go on-line to magicsoda.com and print your coupon for \$1 off your first purchase of Magic Soda.

Issue: Should you try Magic Soda

Conclusion: Yes.

Reasons: Magic Soda makes your clothes whiter. (Third party lab test)

Eco-cert has reviewed the chemicals and certified that it has no phosphates or harmful toxins. You can save \$1 if you try Magic Soda now.

(Students can decide which of the reasons they believe holds the most substance. They may also be asked to indicate what difficulties there are with the particular reasons that have been given – such as the lab studies and the eco-cert certification process)

- c) “Whitening that fits you” “Aquafresh® White Trays™ have been designed by cosmetic dentists for whitening that fits you. They’re easy to apply, flexible, disposable, pre-filled trays for a custom fit. For teeth that are visibly whiter in as little as 3 days, with full results in just 7. “

Issue: Should you try Aquafresh® White Trays™?

Conclusion: Yes.

Reasons: They have been designed by cosmetic dentists. They are easy to apply. They are disposable. Teeth are visibly whiter in as little as 3 days.

- d) From “50 Reasons to Love Toronto Right Now” (Toronto Life, June, 2009)

“We regret to inform you that this crummy year is only half over. The good-news –and who doesn’t want some? – is that Toronto has been spared the worst of the vanishing jobs, the teetering banks and the general misery. Not to brag, but residents of such less fortunate burgs as London and New York are jealous of us: our condo boom is still mostly booming; restaurants are booked solid; we finally have our own Frank Gehry masterpiece; and thanks to our beloved Cito, the Jays are off to a winning start. Today we take our city’s enviableness for granted.

Issue: Is Toronto an enviable city?

Conclusion: Yes.

Reasons: Toronto has been spared the worst of the vanishing jobs, teetering banks and general misery. Our condo boom is still mostly booming. Our restaurants are booked solid. We have our own Frank Gehry masterpiece. The Jays are off to a winning start.

e) (Background note: a U.S. Supreme Court ruling requires that states provide free public education to children of illegal aliens.)

Agnes: What a ridiculous ruling. In effect, it rewards lawbreakers.

Belle: What do you mean?

Agnes: Illegal aliens are lawbreakers; they enter the country without permission. If the states have to provide their children with free education, that means the taxpayers, U.S. citizens, are being made to provide benefits for people who have no right to them.

Belle: Sure, it seems that way, but think of the other side of it. Rightly or wrongly, those people are living in this country, and it's in the interests of society to educate the children so that they can become good citizens. Anyway, the children are not responsible for their parents' illegal acts. They are innocent victims and the state should regard them no differently from the children of citizens.³

Start your analysis with the dialogue (not the background information). Take each person's argument and outline it below.

Agnes:

Issue: Should states provide free public education to children of illegal aliens?

Conclusion: No.

Reasons: Illegal aliens are lawbreakers who enter the country without permission.

Taxpayers would have to provide benefits for people who have no right to them.

Belle:

Issue: Should states provide free public education to children of illegal aliens?

Conclusion: Yes.

Reasons: The illegal aliens live in this country and it's in the interest of society to

educate the children to become good citizens. Children are not responsible for their parents' illegal acts. Children of illegal aliens are innocent victims and should be regarded no differently than children of citizens.