

Assessing and Cultivating Critical Thinking Online

Critical thinking is one of the commonly desired goals in teaching. The ATS M.Div. program goals includes “. . . development of capacities—intellectual and affective...” as one of its ministerial formation outcomes (Degree Program Standards A.3.1.3.). The online Discussion Board is one of the most useful methods for developing and assessing critical thinking.

What is Critical Thinking? Critical thinking is constituted by specific components. Below are nine of those components that can be used effectively in the online discussion environment (components not included here are credibility, sufficiency, reliability, and practicality). You can use the following chart to assess and reply to student responses for cultivating critical thinking.

Component	Characteristic	Possible teacher response
Clarity	Student response is understandable. The meaning can be grasped.	<i>Could you elaborate further?</i> <i>Can you give me an example?</i> <i>Could you illustrate what you mean?</i>
Accuracy	The student’s response is free from errors or distortion—it is true.	<i>How could we check on that?</i> <i>How can we find out if that is true?</i> <i>How could we verify or test that?</i>
Precision	The student’s response is exact to the matter at hand.	<i>Can you be more specific?</i> <i>Can you give me more details?</i> <i>Can you be more exact?</i>
Relevance	The student’s response relates to the matter at hand.	<i>How does that relate to the problem/topic?</i> <i>How does that bear on the question?</i> <i>How does that help us with the issue?</i>
Depth	The student’s response contains complexities and multiple interrelationships.	<i>What factors make this a difficult problem?</i> <i>What are some of the complexities of this question/issue?</i> <i>What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?</i>
Breadth	The student’s response encompasses multiple viewpoints.	<i>Do we need to look at this from another perspective?</i> <i>Do we need to consider another point of view?</i> <i>Do we need to look at this in other ways?</i>
Logic	The parts of the student’s response makes sense together—no contradictions.	<i>Does all this make sense together?</i> <i>Does your first statement fit in with your last?</i> <i>Does what you say follow from the evidence?</i>
Significance	The student’s response focuses on the important, not trivial.	<i>Is this the most important problem to consider?</i> <i>Is this the central idea to focus on?</i> <i>Which of these facts are most important?</i>
Fairness	The student’s response is justifiable, not self-serving or one-sided.	<i>Do you have any vested interest in this issue?</i> <i>Are you sympathetically representing the viewpoint of others?</i>

Assessing Student Learning Online, 2010. Galindo

Adapted from, Elder and Paul, *Analytic Thinking: The Elements of Thinking and the Standards They Meet*

(The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 2007)