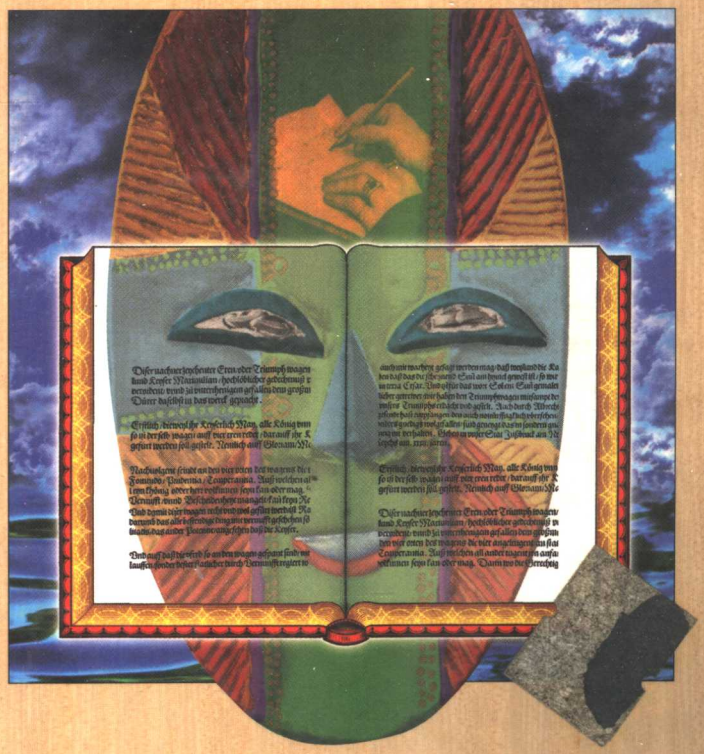
ACADEMIC CONNECTIONS SERIES

CRITICAL THINKING

READING AND WRITING IN A DIVERSE WORLD



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ACADEMIC CONNECTIONS

Critical Thinking

Reading and Writing in a Diverse World

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To the Instructor

Purpose of the Text

For several years we have been trying to develop a curriculum in critical thinking for our upper-level reading courses. We wanted to teach a critical thinking course that moved beyond teaching informal logic and reflected current understanding about the reading and writing process. While we wanted to teach our students how to analyze and debate, we also wanted to teach them how to collaborate. In addition, we wanted them to learn not only how to *challenge* each other's ideas, but also how to *listen* to each other's ideas.

We felt an obligation to our students to develop a text that would actively involve them and that would help them bridge the gap between their personal and social lives and the academic world. We wanted to make them more aware of their own thinking processes by having them read, write, and discuss a variety of topics at different levels of complexity. We hoped to expand their ability to elaborate on their own thinking and their ability to take in another's perspective. Finally, we wanted our text to provide students with analytical skills in reading, writing, and group participation that they could apply in their daily lives and in their other classes.

Critical Thinking: Reading and Writing in a Diverse World uses reading, writing, and discussion as vehicles for the development of students' critical thinking skills. This text can be used in any upper-level reading course. It is suitable as a critical reading text or as a critical thinking text at the college or college-preparatory level. English composition instructors who want to provide their students with structured comprehension and writing assignments and develop students' analytical skills will find this text useful. It is an appropriate supplemental text for use in first-year interdisciplinary courses being offered at several four-year colleges. It is also useful as a supplemental text in teacher preparation courses where instructors want to improve the critical thinking skills of their students. Several readings deal with issues of diversity and education that are relevant for prospective teachers.

Approach

First, the text encourages an *interactive dialogue* between reader and author. Activities and assignments are also designed to foster dialogue among class members. We believe that through spoken and written conversations we discover ourselves as thinkers.

Second, the *process of learning* is important. Students need to be aware of themselves as learners, aware of how they think and how they perceive their world. Our text emphasizes the process of students becoming aware of what they think. The Instructor's Manual describes the process of double-entry journal writing as a means of getting students to process information while they read. The text emphasizes discussion as a means of helping students clarify what they think. Finally, students bring their thoughts together through writing.

Because many students today are reluctant readers, particularly of expository texts, we have focused on reading as a social activity. Our experience has been that reluctant readers are more willing to read in order to discuss than to read simply to mark their texts. We want to create in our students the desire to communicate with us and with one another.

Third, the text provides students and instructors with *choice*. The process of selection helps build communication between student and instructor as well as commitment to learning. Each chapter begins with a checklist that presents an overview of the chapter. Students and instructors can preview the chapter and select those activities, readings, and writing assignments that are of interest. Of course, circumstances may make student choice inappropriate. In those cases the instructor should feel free to make the selections. Furthermore, instructors can choose to emphasize certain aspects of the text. For example, reading instructors may want to focus more on comprehension checks, while writing instructors may want to highlight writing assignments. Many of the discussion questions can be adapted to writing assignments.

Fourth, readings, writing assignments, and discussion questions reflect *different levels of difficulty*. We realize that instructors adapt textbooks to fit their needs. In our classes we have students at various skill levels and have found it valuable to be able to provide all students with challenging assignments. Moreover, we believe that all students

will benefit from hearing and discussing answers to more complex questions than they may be ready to tackle on their own. Instructors may decide to assign specific assignments to certain students, or they may allow students the option of choosing. For example, students who always write from a personal perspective should be encouraged to select a more formal writing assignment. Some students may be asked to complete two writing assignments: one of their choice and one assigned by the instructor.

Coverage

Critical Thinking: Reading and Writing in a Diverse World is divided into three major sections: "Creating Common Ground," "Developing Reasoning Skills," and "Extending Thinking Skills." The three chapters in Part I, "Creating Common Ground," provide students with an orientation to the thinking tasks most often required in college. Students review the reading and learning process and its relationship to their success in studying. In Chapter 3 students are introduced to key concepts in critical thinking. They learn the difference between facts and interpretations as well as the value of "investigating the obvious."

With this foundation students are ready for Part II, "Developing Reasoning Skills," in which they explore a variety of views and perspectives and learn several analytical skills. In Chapter 4 students investigate numerous factors that contribute to people's values and beliefs. In Chapter 5 they explore writers' perspectives in a variety of texts. Chapters 6 and 7 provide students with the analytical skills needed to evaluate ideas and conclusions.

Part III, "Extending Thinking Skills," moves beyond understanding and evaluating our own views and the opinions of others. Chapter 8 asks students to use their skills to make decisions and solve problems. Some instructors may choose to end their courses with Chapter 8; others may decide to include Chapters 9 and 10.

Instructors increasingly are expecting their students to be able to read professional articles as well as evaluate statistical and research findings. Chapters 9 and 10 provide students with the background and

expertise they will need to successfully complete upper-level course work.

Each chapter includes a set of chapter objectives that refer to the thinking skills emphasized in the chapter.

Special Features

- The "To the Student" section that follows includes a list of reading terms and their definitions with which students should be familiar. Instructors can review this list and assign additional work to students who are weak in one of the areas.
- The text does not assume that working well in groups or having good class discussions occurs naturally. The Introduction, "Circling the Square," presents students with strategies for working successfully in groups, and the section "How to Have a Good Discussion" in Chapter 1 offers additional information on how to prepare for class discussion.
- Each chapter includes *Chapter Objectives* and a *Chapter Outline and Checklist*. This checklist can be used as a starting point for chapter study. Instructors and students can preview and select the activities and assignments they will complete. The *Introductory Chapter Activity* highlights a key concept in the chapter and is followed by text that explains the chapter information. A *Discussion Break* or *Activity Break* usually follows the instructional text in each chapter. The *Application* section of the chapter includes a series of readings, comprehension checks, discussion questions, and writing assignments.
- The *application* section contains several thematically linked readings from a variety of sources, including professional and student writings and college texts. In this way the students see how the same topic is discussed from several perspectives and levels of complexity.
- Readings have been selected for their appeal to students, for their ability to generate productive thought and discussion,

and for their capacity to build students' academic background knowledge.

- The Application section ends with a "What Do You Think?" section. Open-ended discussion questions are presented; these are followed by several possible writing assignments.
- Vocabulary study is flexible. Each of the readings has words listed in the margin. These words can form the core of students' vocabulary study. The Instructor's Manual includes several options for vocabulary instruction. Our emphasis is on understanding words in context.
- This text is accompanied by an Instructor's Manual that provides teaching suggestions for each chapter. In addition to suggestions on vocabulary instruction, the Manual also includes possible answers to activities and comprehension checks. Suggestions for student evaluation at the end of each chapter are included.

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To the Student

Welcome to *Critical Thinking: Reading and Writing in a Diverse World.* We believe that critical thinking is a powerful tool to use in your academic, personal, and professional lives.

Developing your critical thinking skills will help you better understand yourself and others. It can help you make decisions, solve problems, and work cooperatively with others. It can help you decide when to "think with your heart" and when to "think with your head."

Critical thinking skills also have particular importance in the academic world. Many college exams, essays, and research papers ask you to perform several kinds of thinking tasks. You might, for example, be asked to explain, summarize, or describe how the human immune system works. The thinking task here is to understand a certain body of information. Or you might be asked to explain the role and function of rites of passage in traditional African society. In this case you must interpret or infer certain information from what you have learned. Finally, you might be asked to evaluate the president's decision not to implement any new taxes. The thinking task here is to evaluate information and make a judgment.

The authors of this book believe that you can improve your reasoning skills by discussing, reading, and writing about a variety of social and academic topics. Your text has five major objectives:

- To develop your ability to read carefully and think critically about some of the topics that interest academics.
- To increase your awareness of multicultural issues in our diverse society and to increase your understanding of the role that culture plays in the formation of our opinions.
- To improve your expository writing skills. This is an essential skill used in writing research and essay papers and in answering essay questions on tests.
- To increase your academic knowledge. We recognize that you have already acquired lots of information, but our goal is to

increase your store of the kind of knowledge that schools — especially colleges — reward.

- To develop your capacity to become a more independent learner as well as a contributor to the learning of other people. We want you to become a more active reader, a more assertive questioner, and a stronger group participant.

Format

We have adopted a conversational tone in our text because we believe that through spoken and written conversations we discover ourselves as thinkers. Each chapter begins with a list of objectives and a checklist. You and your instructor can begin your chapter study by previewing the topics and deciding what will be covered and when. You may also skim over the reading selections and decide which reading and writing assignments you might want to complete. Each chapter is designed to include choice in order to encourage more independent learning. The Introductory Chapter Activity highlights a key concept in the chapter and is followed by text that explains the chapter information. At times you are asked to complete an activity or participate in a discussion.

The *Application* section contains several thematically linked readings from a variety of sources, including professional and student writings and college texts. You will have an opportunity to see how the same topic is discussed from several perspectives and at different levels of complexity. The Application sections also include discussion and comprehension questions and writing assignments.

Vocabulary and Terms

Each reading selection in the *Application* section has a number of words listed in the margin. These words have been selected for vocabulary instruction. Your instructor will explain how you should proceed.

Your text assumes that you are familiar with certain terms or phrases used in discussing comprehension and writing skills. We have included

the following list of terms and a brief explanation for your reference. Some of these terms and phrases are discussed more fully in your text.

- *Previewing.* Previewing skills are the strategies you use to get an idea of what a reading selection is about before you read it thoroughly. The purpose of previewing is to prepare and focus your mind on the reading. Using these previewing skills will help you learn to read faster and to locate information and ideas more efficiently. Previewing skills include activating background knowledge, predicting, and skimming.
- *Activating background knowledge.* By reading the title, the introductory comments, and the source of a text or article, you can review in your mind what you already know about the subject or topic. If you possess a great deal of background knowledge about a topic, chances are the reading will be easy for you. If the text is about an unfamiliar topic, however, you may find it more difficult to comprehend.
- *Predicting.* Often with a careful reading of only a small portion of a text you can predict the outcome of a story or sequence of events. Trying to predict what will happen before you complete a thorough reading of a text engages your mind in the activity of reading. The result of actively "psyching out" the text is that you keep asking questions. This process can also aid your retention of the material for later recall.
- *Skimming.* Skimming involves a partial reading of a text. By reading introductory paragraphs and the first sentences of the other paragraphs, it is often possible to get the "gist," or the general idea, of the whole text. The purpose of skimming may be to quickly assess the whole text or to decide whether a more careful reading is needed.
- *Scanning.* Scanning is the process of moving your eyes through a text looking for specific information. Examples are looking up words in a dictionary, searching for a name in a phone directory, or consulting a map to find a specific location. The purpose of scanning is the efficient location of information. It is especially helpful when using reference materials.

- *Major ideas and supporting details.* The major ideas in a text are the general statements that give the overall idea of either a whole reading or individual paragraphs. The supporting details tell more about the major ideas.
- *Summarizing.* Summarizing is restating material briefly. You are "boiling down" the material to its essentials. You can summarize a text, ideas in your mind, or spoken material. Summarizing is a good test of comprehension.
- *Paraphrasing.* Paraphrasing is restating a word, an idea, or a whole text in your own words. Usually your restatement will simplify or clarify the original.
- *Outlining.* Outlining is a writing skill necessary for summarizing longer texts. It is also an organizing device for planning compositions, essays, speeches, and projects. In addition, it can be used for organizing information after it has been read. Preparing a written outline of the headings or key sentences of a text before a thorough reading can help you divide a long reading, such as a textbook chapter, into manageable chunks. This kind of outlining can be a planning aid.
- *Words in context.* Learning a word "in context" means trying to figure out its meaning by understanding the surrounding words. Read the following sentences:

  The captain trimmed her ship's sails.
  The barber trimmed his customer's mustache.

  The meaning of "trimmed" is different in the two sentences. You might be sure of the second meaning, because it is more common. However, you may have to ask yourself some questions about the first usage: What meaning might make sense in this context? What clues to meaning can I find in the text surrounding this word? You may figure out that it means "to pull in tighter." Perhaps you will have to ask another person or look it up in a dictionary.

Recognizing Our Diversity

We live in a society that is becoming more diverse all the time. Our country includes large numbers of people from many different cultures and ethnic backgrounds. We participate in the dominant Anglo culture; however, we also may participate in other groups that include non-Anglo traditions. In Chapter 4 we discuss the influence culture can exert in determining a person's values as well as the positions they take on many controversial issues. Throughout this text we offer essays and articles that highlight some of the issues surrounding our becoming a more diverse nation. An expanded awareness of cultural perspectives is a valuable critical thinking tool in the academic world and in society at large.

Conclusion

We believe that you do your best when there are high expectations for your achievement and when you are shown how to succeed. We are committed to providing you with challenging information and exercises as well as instruction on how to be successful. We welcome hearing directly from students. If there are ways that we might make this text more useful and interesting to you, let us know!

Introduction: Circling the Square

We believe that many students experience schooling and education as an individual exercise. They are usually involved in some form of competition with other students over grades, over attention from the teacher, and even over the attention of other students in the class. This emphasis on competition can make it very difficult for them to work with one another. Since the idea of competition is so fundamental to their learning, it is not easy for them to share their ideas and thoughts with others. Competition assumes that in order for one person to win another has to lose. And obviously, no one wants to lose. For example, if Azanda's grades depend on how well or how poorly Tim does, she is not going to want to share information with him that might lower her grade.

We all spend a lot of time and energy trying to be independent and self-reliant. As a result, we may view those who seek or need help as being weak and less competent than those who can go it alone. This stigma presents problems for those who need assistance since they will be reluctant to seek it, and for those who want to give it since they may not know how to do so without offending the recipient. These are just a few of the problems that emerge when we work with others in a group.

What happens when we have to work with someone whose behavior and attitude make it difficult for us to be in the group, let alone to accomplish the task of the group? Members in the group become frustrated and angry, which makes the situation even worse. Many times the frustration can lead to angry outbursts and withdrawal from the group. More often people tend to withdraw quietly — the body may continue to be there, but the mind has wandered off. Sometimes members identify one individual as being responsible for the failure of the whole group. That person becomes the scapegoat even though the entire group is responsible for its success or failure. This kind of experience is not unusual; it happens in schools, in corporations, in government committees, and even in teachers' groups.

In spite of the difficulties, working with others is an extremely important part of the learning process. Indeed, being able to work with others is becoming a criterion for success in the working world. While we all have individual responsibilities and styles of doing things, we rarely can function in any organization without working closely with other people. However, the process of working successfully with others is not always intuitive and requires some awareness and knowledge of the social dynamics that emerge within a group. The more you know about how groups function, the better prepared you will be to work with others and the more effective you can be in accomplishing group tasks.

This Introduction will provide you with some ideas on how to work together in groups in meaningful and productive ways. Following our suggestions will improve your ability to learn from others and create a foundation for cooperative learning. Thinking critically does not simply mean arguing with others, it also means developing an ability to think and communicate with others. Not only will you be required to participate in groups for many activities and discussions in this book, you are liable to take part in groups throughout your life.

Getting Ready to Work in Groups

Working in groups can be an ideal opportunity to exercise some critical thinking skills, to learn more about how you interact with others, and to experience personal growth. In order for this process to be most beneficial, however, you need to pay attention to a number of important group development issues and to be aware of yourself as you experience this rather complex process. In this case, paying attention means being aware of your own feelings as you engage in the process — when you feel bored, excited, scared, or anxious. It also means trying to pay attention to the feelings of the other group members. As you can imagine, trying to maintain awareness of yourself and others while at the same time trying to accomplish some task can become very complicated.

Understanding the Role of Critical Thinking

Earlier, we mentioned the ability to think critically as one of a set of skills necessary to make a group function effectively. Critical thinking skills can be used to analyze and evaluate not only the tasks that the group has been asked to complete, but also the group process itself.

Most groups are formed to deal with some problem or issue that its members are interested in. Do you remember getting together with the other kids in your neighborhood to play a game or to answer the age-old question, What is there to do? In a sense, you got together to solve problems, and critical thinking skills were a necessity.

However, critical thinking in this situation is not competitive. The goal is not to "win" as is the case in formal debating; rather, critical thinking is cooperative and is used to share thoughts and examine ideas and solutions so that the group can accomplish its goals. As young children in the neighborhood, you did not get together to rationally debate whether you should do one thing or the other. Everyone simply presented suggestions, which were then discussed and acted upon.

Ideally, a group shares ideas, examines several possibilities, and then agrees on the single best option. A sense of humility in terms of learning and sharing is very useful at this point. When group members feel no need to dominate or to take charge, all members can contribute possible options. Sometimes the best ideas come from the most surprising source, perhaps from the person who speaks the least. If, on the other hand, the process becomes competitive, with different people vying for control, then individuals become critical of one another as persons. This immediately heightens the level of frustration in the group and reduces its chances of achieving its goals in a way that is beneficial to all members.

Heeding the Message, Not the Messenger

Within the group framework it is very important to distinguish between people and their ideas. The necessity for doing so is greater within a working group since the sharing of ideas is essential to enhancing the