

# THINKING FOR YOURSELF

DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING  
SKILLS THROUGH WRITING



SECOND EDITION

MARLYS MAYFIELD

# Thinking for Yourself

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DEVELOPING CRITICAL  
THINKING SKILLS  
THROUGH WRITING

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Second Edition

Marlys Mayfield

COLLEGE OF ALAMEDA



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## FOREWORD

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Marlys Mayfield's book does not preach critical thinking; it practices it. Instantly engaging and irresistible to read, it contains an abundance of superb examples showing the richness and complexity of the thought we engage in every day. These examples are then successfully linked to the course material in such a way that it soon becomes quite evident how mastery of these few concepts can powerfully affect the discourse in almost any field—evidence often sought but not often achieved in the teaching of critical thinking.

This book is also about the writing process—about the courage to keep questioning even at the risk of not getting the assignment done neatly and on time and about the truths that can show up on the page unexpectedly when that courage is exercised. It is not a book about how to write “argumentative essays,” “convince” an audience, or “defend” one's conclusions, but about how to use the writing process to test one's own convictions and make sure they are worth promoting. It is not, in short, about how to *sell* the truth, but about how to find it.

*Thinking for Yourself* begins where the effort to find the truth must begin: in observation. And by thus grounding critical thought in perception, it manages to promote self-confidence even while it leads toward self-scrutiny, a delicate accomplishment that is crucial to the successful teaching of critical thinking.

Indeed, throughout the text, the underlying approach continually proves both psychologically astute and morally appealing, for it takes as the touchstone of critical thought the perceptions and opinions of the individual thinker. It recognizes that the point of instruction in this area is not that students should come to doubt their powers, but that they

should come to know where they are responsible for the exercise of these powers and to understand how they may improve this exercise.

Thus in Part I, after developing care for what one observes (Chapter 1), Mayfield encourages similar care in the choice of words for talking about these observations (Chapter 2). Only then are facts discussed (Chapter 3), the placement of this topic subtly making the essential point that “facts” depend on words and perceptions. Inference (Chapter 4) is carefully distinguished from fact, and the groundwork is laid for the discussion of inductive argument.

Part II is similarly astute and respectful. Not content with a simple “fact/opinion” or “fact/value” split, in which opinions are dismissed as “mere” opinions and values are tolerated only as necessary evils, Marlys Mayfield reaffirms the value of the decision making and judging that students do daily, while inspiring them to do it better. Her readers will not become fence-sitters or skeptics, nor will they be able to fall back on “Well, it’s all just a matter of opinion, anyway!”

Of particular value—and rarity—among critical thinking texts is the acknowledgment in Part II of the role of feelings and intuition. The text here appeals to the practical and makes immediate connections with most domains. And in such appeal, as well, the text is culturally accessible, honoring the “ways of knowing” not only of women and of students of color, but also of managers and employees—and indeed of all those whose hands-on experience of the world makes them skeptical of mere bookishness.

Having thus firmly established the locus of critical thinking in the individual writer as perceiver and doer, Marlys Mayfield then pursues formal thought. Her final chapters on research and formal argumentation successfully build a bridge into academic competence.

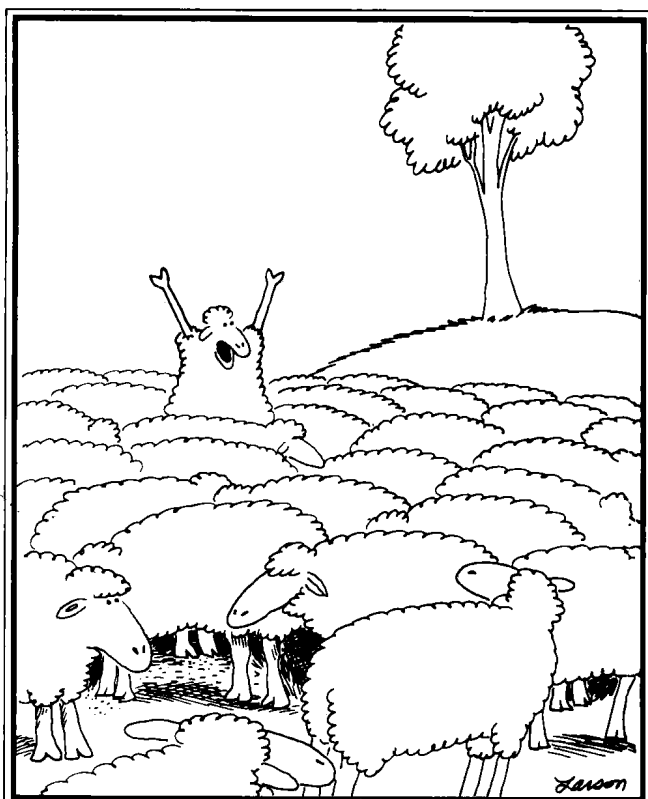
To have been drawn into this book and worked through its exercises—which come as naturally as responses in a conversation—is to have learned what cannot be unlearned: how to think more carefully, not only in class, but wherever else it matters.

NANCY GLOCK

*California Community Colleges*

## P R E F A C E

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“Wait! Wait! Listen to me! . . . We don’t HAVE to be just sheep!”

Used with permission of Chronicle Features, San Francisco.

## **HISTORY OF THE TEXT**

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Critical thinking can feel like waking up. Sometimes it's in the momentous, and sometimes in the ordinary, but inevitably it's a discovery that we have been asleep.

Since 1987, the year of this book's first edition, the momentous aspect has accelerated beyond any historical precedent. In chain reaction explosions, one nation after the other has stood up to say, "We don't HAVE to be just sheep!" It would seem that no matter how long a people are suppressed, they will eventually assert their need to think for themselves.

This book originated through some acts of waking up. Its germination began with a nagging dissatisfaction with the way I had been teaching English composition for fifteen years. Like my colleagues, I knew that writing was clear when thinking was clear. And so, I wondered, why not focus primarily on the thinking process instead of the writing process? Why not use writing to show how we think, instead of thinking so much about how we write? It seemed to me that this approach would do more to improve writing in the long run. The problem then was that none of us knew how to teach thinking, or even if that were possible.

By the late seventies, I learned it was possible: a number of educators were demonstrating some new theories and curricula for teaching thinking. They included foremost the work of J. P. Guilford and Mary Meeker in California and that of Reuven Feuerstein in Israel. In 1980 I received a small grant to undertake a teaching internship in the Feuerstein method, called "Instrumental Enrichment." I chose this program because it is based on a clearly identified hierarchy of thinking skills and because it teaches students an awareness of their thinking processes. By 1982 I was teaching two new experimental college courses. The first was a remedial course in thinking skills based on the Feuerstein system. The second was an English college transfer course designed to fulfill the new California State University critical thinking course requirements. Since this requirement specified content but did not restrict critical thinking to any particular departments or types of courses, I decided to combine critical thinking with writing into one course, calling it Critical Thinking in Reading and Writing.

This book is based on the material I developed for that course. It was written chapter by chapter as I worked with my students, based on whatever they needed to know. And what they did not know often astonished me: the difference between facts and inferences; between reasons and conclusions; the meaning of assumptions, opinions, and evaluations; the significance of viewpoint. During this period I was also working with Wadsworth Publishing Company, whose editors and reviewers offered

suggestions and assistance that continued to shape the book's content and organization. The end product became a unique text serving two purposes:

To teach English composition through an emphasis on the thinking process, serving as a composition text.

To teach critical thinking through writing applications, serving as a critical thinking course text.

Aside from a general updating of the text with new examples, cartoons, and photographs, the guiding purpose of the second edition revision has been to provide instructors with more flexibility and teaching options. For instructors who wish to emphasize critical reading, there are now more than twenty new reading selections to choose from. For those who want to assign a research paper, there is a new chapter on research skills. For instructors who want to try collaborative learning, each chapter offers assignments that allow this. Further flexibility lies in the text's organization, which permits selective use of the material. While the text contains sufficient material for a two-quarter or two-semester course, instructors can tailor the material to fit the requirements of a one-quarter or one-semester course.

The feedback of students and their instructors guided the growth of this edition. I collected feedback not only from my own students, but also from my Peralta Colleges colleagues, as well as from instructors all across the country. This has indeed become our collaboration.

## **APPROACH AND COVERAGE**

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1. This text teaches both critical thinking and composition by emphasizing awareness of the personal thinking process. From the training of personal awareness, it moves to the more advanced stages of analyzing the thinking of others.
2. This book begins on a more fundamental level than most other critical thinking books, yet proceeds to a more advanced level than most, requiring students to develop and demonstrate highly sophisticated analytical skills.
3. The first half of the text works extensively with critical thinking in *nonverbal* problems, using photographs, cartoons, descriptive assignments, and report assignments. The second half moves into the more traditional application of critical thinking to *verbal* problems, analyses, and arguments.
4. The text provokes its readers constantly to think in order to work their way through the materials. Its problem and writing



assignments force confrontation with the common tricks and defenses used to avoid thinking. Some of these include the use of glib phrases, stereotypes, fixed opinions, the disregard of instructions, the substitution of evaluations and imagination for facts, the use of unexamined assumptions, and the acceptance of false authority.

5. In its style and pedagogy, the text shows consistent concern for the interaction of the cognitive and affective domains of learning. It also addresses directly the problems of distinguishing between feelings that clarify thinking and those that hinder it.
6. The text uses practical, everyday examples, connecting the concepts learned about thinking to life's problems. Direct quotations taken from the media concerning political and social issues are used extensively to illustrate the ubiquity and influence of arguments in our lives as well as the need for standards by which to judge them.

## **SPECIAL FEATURES AND FURTHER REVISIONS**

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1. Each chapter begins with *Discovery Exercises*, which provide opportunities for students to uncover principles about thinking for themselves. They also engage and motivate students by asking them to draw on their own experiences and the things that interest them.
2. A study of the table of contents shows that Parts I and II cover basic material not usually presented in such depth in critical thinking texts, while Part III still offers extensive treatment of the more traditional topics of critical thinking, such as inductive and deductive reasoning, logical fallacies, and the critical analysis of arguments.
3. Several tools for evaluating student progress appear in the text. Each chapter ends with a summary and a true-false chapter quiz. These quizzes can be used to provoke further learning through oral review, or they can be used as written examinations. The Instructor's Manual contains tests on Parts I and II, new written content questions and essay thought questions for each chapter, tests on dictionary skills, additional tests on logical fallacies and reasons and conclusions, and two additional final exams.
4. The *Writing Applications* are another special feature. They can be used in English courses or any other course that wishes to encourage additional composition writing. They are designed to

provide more practice of the skills learned in each chapter, as well as to promote mastery of more and more complex rhetorical forms, ranging from the narrative and definition essay to the argumentative essay. In this edition, several Writing Applications have been revised to improve student comprehension, and three new ones have been included. Additional student writing examples have been added to further clarify assignment directions and to show possibilities for relating critical thinking to writing.

5. Many essays and short stories (averaging two a chapter) have been added to the second edition and serve to illustrate each chapter's main idea. These selections are either literary or else offer additional information concerning propaganda and the media. The boxes that appear in most chapters offer additional short readings that can be used in warm-up discussions or as additional writing assignments.
6. The research skills chapter is new to this edition and is designed to be optional. Its placement as Chapter 9 allows students to begin a research project by the middle of their term using the concepts and skills learned through Chapter 8. The requirements of the chapter writing assignment should move student interest forward to the problems of evaluating and building arguments as discussed in the succeeding chapters.
7. The chapter on logical fallacies from the first edition has been divided into two parts and placed at the ends of Chapter 9, "Inductive Reasoning," and Chapter 10, "Deductive Reasoning." This spares students from having to remember so many logical fallacies at once.
8. The Instructor's Manual has been expanded to include not only more tests, but also more teaching support for the new instructor, offering a bibliography, charts, transparency masters, and suggested answers to all exercises and tests.
9. Although many optional choices appear in this text, there are, nevertheless, some core writing assignments and exercises designed to evoke learning experiences that must be completed before the text can be fully understood. Each of these develops a particular thinking skill in a gradient sequence. It is recommended that both instructors and students complete each of the assignments listed below. Please also note that each title is preceded in the text by a star as a reminder of its core significance.
  - \* Introduction: The Thomas Family (p. 2)
  - \* Observing the Familiar: Vegetables and Fruit (p. 20)
  - \* Observing the Unfamiliar: Tool (p. 23)
  - \* Finding Facts in Photographs (p. 99)

- Using Facts and Inferences to Describe a Photograph (p. 130)
- Articulating Hidden Assumptions Behind Arguments (p. 165)
- Observing Viewpoints in Magazines (p. 238)

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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The ten years I have spent in the writing of these two editions have brought me many devoted helpers and illuminating advisers. First, I wish to thank the many reviewers who let me know what their students needed and what could best serve them. They include Gary Christensen, Macomb County Community College; Robert Dees, Orange Coast College; Yvonne Frye, Community College of Denver; Helen Gordon, Bakersfield College; Patricia Grignon, Saddleback College; Elizabeth Hanson-Smith, California State University, Sacramento; Ralph Jenkins, Temple University; Shelby Kipplen, Michael J. Owens Technical College; Eileen Lundy, University of Texas, San Antonio; Daniel Lynch, La Guardia Community College; L. J. McDoniel, St. Louis Community College, Meramec; Paul Olubas, Southern Ohio College; Sue Sixberry, Mesabi Community College; and Patricia Smittle, Santa Fe Community College.

Next, I must thank those Wadsworth staff members who gave me day-by-day support in the creation of this second edition. They include first and foremost my English editor, Angie Gantner, and her assistant, Julie Johnson; our production editor, Vicki Friedberg; our designer, Donna Davis; our permissions editor, Peggy Meehan; and my own assistant, Kristina Bear.

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