

COMM 1310, Section 1: Thinking & Listening Critically (Fall 2006)

Class Meets: MWF, 9-9:50, CN 231

Instructor: Matt Barton, Ph. D.

Office: Centrum 213G

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Text:

Inch, E. S., & Warnick, B., Endres, D. (2006). *Critical thinking and communication* (5th Ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Course Description:

A study of critical thinking and reasoning skills toward messages delivered and received through various communication formats. The course is designed to aid the student in the ability to define a problem, select pertinent information for the solution of the problem, recognize stated and unstated assumptions, formulate and select relevant hypotheses, and make valid conclusions and inferences. The major goal of this course is to help students become more critical consumers of information.

Course Objectives:

1. Students will be able to define, explain and understand theories, arguments, and evidence related to various social and contemporary topics.

Assessment: This objective will be accomplished through class discussion/activities, course examinations & other short written assignments.

2. Students will be able to identify stated and unstated assumptions surrounding various societal and cultural issues and be able to draw definitive conclusions about their importance and validity.

Assessment: This objective will be accomplished by completing specific short written assignments.

3. Students will be able to deconstruct the arguments surrounding a contemporary social issue from the perspectives of various groups involved. They will also be able to construct an argument that provides a potentially viable solution to the problem.

Assessment: The objective will be accomplished by completing the final paper for this course.

Course Policies:

ATTENDANCE: Regular attendance and participation is strongly encouraged in this course. I do not appreciate students missing class or arriving late. If you choose to miss class on the day that an assignment is due, you are responsible for turning it in anyway. The only exceptions are in the case of legitimate and documented illness, family emergency or school approved function. If you are going to be absent, you need to contact me in advance. I will deal with these situations on a case-by-case basis and I reserve the right to make the final judgment about excused absences.

LATE WORK: You should plan to turn in your work by 5 pm on the day it is due, late work will receive a non-negotiable 20% grade reduction for each day (this includes 2 days for weekends) it is late unless your situation falls under the excused category above. Late assignments must be turned in no later than one week after they are due or you will receive a zero. I will not award incompletes in this course except for a serious medical crisis or other extenuating circumstances that will be judged on a case-by-case basis. We will also do a number of informal writing/research assignments that go directly toward your education in this course.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT: Each student is expected to complete his/her own work. Any student caught cheating in any way on exams or submitting another person's work for written assignments will receive an "F" for the assignment. Plagiarism is also unacceptable in this course and will result in a failing grade, thus if you are unfamiliar with what constitutes plagiarism, please ask to avoid any problems. Students who misrepresent excuses for missing class or turning in late work will also receive an "F" on that assignment. If you would like to

work on a research project in this class that is similar to another one in a different course, both instructors must be made aware of such similarities. In such events students may be required to present both projects to the instructor at the end of the course. If you fail to disclose such work, I will consider your assignment to be plagiarized and you will receive a failing grade on your transcript.

CELL PHONES/LAPTOPS: The following behaviors related to cell phone use distract from the learning environment and will not be tolerated in class: (1) Absolutely no “texting” (2) Do not answer your phone (3) If you have to have it on for legitimate work purposes set it on vibrate & if you leave the room to take a call do not come back to class (4) Do not take pictures of or record other people. I am certainly in favor of laptop use in class to help you with note taking. However you should not check/return email, surf the web or play games during class. If I reference a website during our discussion that you want to examine briefly that is legit, otherwise you will be warned about inappropriate behavior & then prevented from bringing your laptop to class.

STUDENT SUPPORT: In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, please be familiar with the following statement. Students with medical, psychological, learning or other disabilities desiring academic adjustments, accommodations, or auxiliary aids must contact the Disability Support Center, Room 205D, Sharwan Smith Center, phone (435) 865-8022. The Disability Support Center determines eligibility for and authorizes the provision of these services and aids.

EXAMS: Exams in this class will include 25 multiple choice questions that will assess your knowledge of class discussion and your ability to read and process the content of the course text. Additionally there will be one short answer essay (a blue book is required). These exams will be challenging and will require you to not only read the material, but take good notes and make connections between theory and application.

WRITTEN WORK: All assignments for this class should conform to APA 5th edition style (when appropriate). It is your responsibility to obtain and be familiar with this writing style. The specific requirements for each assignment are broken down into greater detail on a separate handout. Additionally if you have any concerns over a grade that you receive on an assignment or exam, feel free to discuss it with me. I prefer that you think carefully about your question, write down what you see as a discrepancy and then take care of it in 1 week or less. The grade as awarded will stand relating to issues not resolved during this time frame.

CONTENT DISCLAIMER: As the title “Critical Thinking” suggests, this course deals with matters in controversy. It will examine a variety of fact, value, and policy claims with an eye toward examining competing truth claims. Students cannot expect that all material presented will be consistent with their own perceived knowledge, value orientation, or political beliefs. While students **will not be required** to adopt any value orientation or political belief to succeed in the course, they **should** expect to learn to apply required knowledge to the examination of such orientations and beliefs. I would ask that you be respectful of other opinions even in cases where you may disagree with what is said.

COURSE EVALUATIONS:

Students are encouraged to provide feedback on course content and instruction. Courses are evaluated electronically according to new university policy. During the last week of instruction, all students will have access to WebCT for the purpose of evaluating each of their courses. To access the system, students will (1) on the Internet, go to SUU’s Homepage (suu.edu); (2) click **Current Students**; (3) click **WebCT**; (4) log in with **Username** and **Password** exactly as done in the campus computer labs-- If students don’t know their Username or Password, they can click on the choices on this screen that will provide them; (5) once logged in, students will see a list of courses, with **Course Evaluation** in each title—they will then click on the course they wish to evaluate. If you need any help with this process, let me know.

NOTE: Information contained in this syllabus, other than the grade and absence policy, may be subject to change with advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.

Course Assignments

Exam #1	50 points
Exam #2	50 points
Exam #3	50 points
Letter – Rough Draft	50 points
Letter – Final Draft	50 points
Letter – Submission	25 points
Finding Fallacies	50 points
Final Paper	100 points
Total	425 points

Grade Breakdown:

A	425-399	B	369-357	C	327-315	D	284-272
A-	398-383	B-	356-340	C-	314-298	D-	271-255
B+	382-370	C+	339-328	D+	297-385	F	254-0

COURSE SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Assignment
Aug 28	Course Introduction – Introductory Activity	Info card; Read web docs
Aug 30	Selected web documents – Current Events Journal	
Sep 1	Ch. 1 (Arguments, Argumentation & Critical Thought)	
Sep 4	<i>Labor Day Recess</i>	
Sep 6	Ch. 1 (cont)	
Sep 8	Ch. 2 (How Arguments Work)	
Sep 11	Ch. 2 (cont)	
Sep 13	What is Truth (Shick & Vaughn)	
Sep 15	Ch. 3 (Argument Analysis & Criticism)	
Sep 18	Ch. 3 (cont)	
Sep 20	Tools for Understanding Arguments (Herrick) The Persuaders	
Sep 22	Tools for Understanding Arguments	
Sep 25	Ch. 4 (Argument Claims & Propositions)	
Sep 27	Ch. 4 (cont)	
Sep 29	Exam #1	Scantron Required
Oct 2	Ch. 5 (Evidence)	
Oct 4	Ch. 5 (cont)	Letter – Rough Draft Due
Oct 6	Ch. 6 (Reasoning)	
Oct 9	Ch. 6 (cont)	
Oct 11	Ch. 6 (cont)	
Oct 13	Ch. 7 (Facts & Case Construction)	Finding Fallacies Due
Oct 16	Ch. 7 (cont)	
Oct 18	Ch. 8 (Values)	
Oct 20	Ch. 8 (cont)	
Oct 23	<i>Harvest Day Recess</i>	
Oct 25	Exam #2	Scantron Required
Oct 27	Ch. 9 (Policies)	
Oct 30	Ch. 9 (cont)	

Nov 1	Workshop Day	Letter – Final Draft Due
Nov 3	Managing the News (Kahane)	
Nov 6	(cont)	
Nov 8	(cont)	
Nov 10	Ch. 10 (Culture & Language)	
Nov 13	Ch. 10 (cont)	Letter to Editor – Part 2 Due
Nov 15	Library Research for Final Paper	
Nov 17	Library Research for Final Paper	
Nov 20	TV News Magazines	Topic Approval
Nov 22	<i>Thanksgiving Recess</i>	
Nov 24	<i>Thanksgiving Recess</i>	
Nov 27	TV News Magazines (cont)	Letter Submission Deadline
Nov 29	Library Day	
Dec 1	Workshop Day	Final Paper Draft Due
Dec 4	Ch. 11 (Arguers, Recipients, Ethics)	Final Paper Due
Dec 6	Ch. 11 (cont)	
Dec 8	Course Wrap Up & Exam Review	
Dec 14	Final Exam (9:00-10:50)	Scantron Required

Letter to the Editor

In an effort to engage you in a socially responsible way in society I am asking you to come up with your very own letter to the editor. You may choose any topic that interests you, preferably discussing your choice with me before you begin. Please complete the following steps:

- 1) Complete a 2 page draft (approximately 500 words) by October 4th.
- 2) Complete a final draft of 500 words or less by November 1st.
- 3) Once you have completed the final draft, you can take my feedback, fix your letter (as you deem necessary) & submit it to a newspaper for publication consideration. You are required to submit the letter to a newspaper (by November 27th) in order to receive the final points related to this assignment. You are required to provide a copy of the letter you submit as proof of your submission.
- 4) If your letter is published before the final exam you will be awarded 20 extra credit points provided you show proof that it was published in the paper. The newspaper should be at least the size of the Daily News (based on circulation) & should be limited to Utah and Nevada news outlets. If your letter is published in the University Journal you will be awarded no more than 10 points as long as you are not part of the journal staff.

Finding Fallacies in the Newspaper

Take an edition of any newspaper & identify 5 fallacies in the various articles. You can look at any section you deem appropriate, but the letters to the editor section is usually a good place to find poor reasoning. Remember to turn in a copy of the articles & highlight the area in the article where you believe the fallacy exists (you will not receive a grade unless this step is followed). In your write up you must:

- 1) Define/explain the fallacy.
- 2) Explain why the section you've highlighted is an example of this particular fallacy in reasoning.
- 3) Characterize the way this fallacy impacts the effectiveness of the article.

You can use the book as a reference to help you understand different fallacies as well as the following critical thinking website that has a comprehensive index of fallacies. <http://www.fallacyfiles.org/> You may work in groups of no larger than 3, but all students in the group will receive the same grade – no exceptions. We will discuss this assignment in more detail in class.

Final Paper – Evaluating a Persuasive Case

The final assignment in this class will ask you to evaluate a current social topic that has clearly defined positions that disagree with one another. Your job is to evaluate the arguments on both sides of the issue by analyzing at least 4 specific examples from print, television and online sources dealing with each side of your topic (45 points). You may choose any topic that you wish, but it must be approved by me or you will fail the assignment. You are to write a 4-5 page paper that explores the issue. You may work with one or two other people on this assignment, but all students will receive the same grade for the final paper.

After you have discussed both sides of the problem and evaluated their effectiveness, you should decide which side you find more persuasive and then examine the basis for your decision and how valid that position is relative to what we have discussed in class. Has your thinking changed any during the semester (45 points)?

You will be graded on how well you analyze the case and answer the general and specific questions that go with each example. Remember to be clear and organized and carefully proofread your paper to eliminate grammatical errors (10 points). This paper should contain at least 8 outside sources of information on the topic.