

Demystifying Critical Thinking  
An Analytical Approach  
Ian J. Dove  
Department of Philosophy  
UNLV

Outline

1. What is Critical Thinking? Can we get any Guidance from the UULO?  
[Meh. Probably not.]
2. An Analytical Approach: The so-called *Critical Thinking Movement* of the 1970s was itself based on a prior movement stemming from Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* (1958). Toulmin was concerned to find a way to assess reasoning without having to appeal to formal logic. The other theoretical element is Charles Hamblin's *Fallacies* (1970). The project became an attempt to assess claims.
3. TLC: Truth, Logic, Clarity Here is an attempt to distill the important features of the UULO into a small, helpful, useful, and memorable summary. We want students to be able to assess the acceptability of the claims they make and read, we want them to identify and assess the support for the claims they accept, we want them to explicitly deal with counterevidence and rebuttals to the claims they put forward, and we want them to do all this clearly. Roughly, we want them to handle information with TLC.
4. "Truth" is too strong of a requirement. Acceptability, appropriateness, and plausibility better explicate the notion. We want students to be aware that not everything they think is true/acceptable is true/acceptable to others.
5. "Logic" stands in for reasoning or rational support. Students too often assert what needs to be supported.
6. Clarity is in some ways self-explanatory. We want students to write and think clearly.

Possible Activities

Truth:

- Find controversial claims in assigned reading. Then give/defend IPA. Finally, verify!  
(initial plausibility assessment)

Logic:

- Reconstruct short passages from the readings that contain reasoning. Use a hypothetical strength test (assume the supporting reasons are true, but you know nothing about the result except the reasons—give/explain this measure of strength for the argument).

Clarity

- Distill a complex claim into a (very, very, ..., very) short slogan.