

Handout: Critical Thinking Prompts*

These critical thinking prompts can help you gain additional insights and ideas about your topic by using some well-established lines of thought. They will help you think about your topic in some new ways. First, write what you now think you want to prove about your topic, and then write your responses to some of the prompts. You should be pleased by the quantity of new information these questions generate for your paper.

1. **Associate it.** Consider other related issues, big issues, or enduring issues (issues that have captured people's attention for ages). Also associate your issue with familiar subjects and ideas.
2. **Describe it.** Use detail. Make the description visual if you can.
3. **Compare it.** Think about items in the same or different categories. Compare it with things you know or understand well. Compare what you used to think about the issue and what you think now. Give reasons for your change of mind.
4. **Apply it.** Show practical uses or applications. Show how it can be used in a specific setting.
5. **Divide it.** Get insight into your issue by dividing it into related issues or into parts of the issue.
6. **Agree and disagree with it.** Identify the extreme pro and con positions and reasons for holding them. List other approaches and perspectives. Say why each position, including your own, might be plausible and in what circumstances.
7. **Consider it as it is, right now.** Think about your issue as it exists, right now, in contemporary time. What is its nature? What are its special characteristics?
8. **Consider it over a period of time.** Think about it in the past and how it might present itself in the future. Does it change? How? Why?
9. **Decide what it is a part of.** Put it in a larger category, and consider the insights you gain as a result.
10. **Analyze it.** Break it into parts, and get insight into each of its parts.
11. **Synthesize it.** Put it back together in new ways so that the new whole is different, and perhaps clearer and better, than the old whole.
12. **Evaluate it.** Decide whether it is good or bad, valuable or not valuable, moral or immoral. Give evidence to support your evaluation.
13. **Elaborate on it.** Add and continue to add explanation until you can understand it more easily. Give some examples to provide further elaboration.
14. **Project and predict.** Answer the question "What would happen if . . . ?" Think about further possibilities.
15. **Ask why, and keep asking why.** Examine every aspect of your issue by asking why.

*As presented in: Wood, Nancy. Essentials of Argument. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006.