Critical Thinking
Institutional Interpretation

As of February 18, 2016

Definitions & Rubric

- **Critical Thinking Skills (SJC),** “Students will develop habits of mind, allowing them to appreciate the processes by which scholars in various disciplines organize and evaluate data and use the methodologies of each discipline to understand the human experience.”
- **Critical Thinking Skills (THECB),** “to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.”

General Issues & Discussion

- **Persuasive vs. Informative Assignments.** An ongoing discussion exists among evaluators regarding whether the critical thinking rubric requires a common assignment be persuasive in nature or if an informative assignment is sufficient. The difficulty seems to lie in the “Position” and “Conclusion” criteria. The college seems to be leaning toward a persuasive position being necessary; that suggest that purely informative assignments may not align well with the rubric and will be a Usability Level 3. However, the interpretation is not yet firm, so the determination of usability for an informative assignment remains as the discretion of the evaluator.

- **Setting a standard for our graduates and core complete students.** The question addressed through this assessment process is, “Are we, as an institution, effective in educating our students to attain the general education outcomes?” That question focuses on students that graduate (with an AA, AS, or AAT) or complete the core. As we assess, we should not make allowances (e.g. assess more easily) for students we believe may be earlier in their college career; we acknowledge that the technology does not yet support ideal sampling methods (work sampled only from recent graduates), and we consider that limitation when analyzing the results. Our standard for and expectations of our graduates and core complete students should be applied consistently.

- **Grading Perspective.** The levels of the rubric do not correspond to a particular grade (e.g. Level 4 does not equate to an “A”) or to a particular level of academic experience (freshman, sophomore etc.). More importantly, we are not assessing student work for the purpose of assigning a grade; the purpose is to identify their relative level of critical thinking to evaluate how well San Jacinto College is helping student attain that skill. Thus, if a student only performs at a Level 1 even though they are addressing the assignment extremely well, it is still a Level 1 of performance.

- **Frame analytic (criterion-by-criterion) assessment within a holistic assessment framework.** Once all criterion have been evaluated, consider the student’s performance more holistically. Is the student’s work representative of work you would be confident as labeling “successful critical thinking” by a San Jacinto College graduate or core complete student. Alternatively, is the student’s work representative of work you believe should *not* be labeled as “successful critical thinking” by a San Jacinto College graduate or core complete student? Use your answers to those questions to consider your criterion-by-criterion assessment

- **Generalize behaviors (reading holistically).** It is valid to consider the examples given within the criteria or within the institutional interpretation to be a general description of that level of critical thinking rather than the only valid examples of that skill level. The work presented by the student may represent a comparable level of skill. In other words, given another opportunity to complete the assignment, would a student performing as they are given their response to the assignment perhaps exhibit the specific examples offered by the rubric or institutional interpretation?

- **Writing and composition skills.** Student’s mechanical writing skills – good or bad – are independent of (though perhaps correlated to) their critical thinking skills; guard against exceptionally poor or exceptionally good writing unduly influencing your assessment of the critical thinking skills exhibited, per the rubric. Also, a student may not necessarily organize their response very well; they may not use conventional composition strategies and techniques. Do read across the entire response for evidence of individual criterion; for example, a student may have no introduction but do a reasonable job of identifying a problem/thesis elsewhere in their response.

- **Accuracy of content specific knowledge.** The critical thinking rubric does not assess content specific knowledge. It is possible for a student to complete an assignment based on incorrect knowledge schema while still demonstrating adequate critical thinking. Certainly, very specific content errors that do not affect the meaning of the document should not unduly lower the assessment on the rubric.
Institutional Interpretation of Criteria

Explanation of Issues
- Successful students state, clarify, and describe an issue or problem or topic to be critically considered, even if description or clarification has some gaps (e.g. terms undefined, backgrounds unknown). Unsuccessful students simply state the issue without any further clarification or description.
- The explanation of issues does not necessarily have to occur in the introductory paragraph; consider the Writing and Composition Skills noted previously.

Evidence
- Successful students interpret, evaluate, and perhaps qualify the evidence and the source of evidence they may use. Unsuccessful students use evidence and accept the viewpoints of the source as fact.
- This criterion focuses more on the student’s interpretation of the evidence and the questioning and analysis of experts’ viewpoints than it does simple inclusion of sources in the response.
- “Taken from sources” suggests the use of evidence to support analysis; this may include informal references to a primary source. This criterion does not require or suggest any particular method for documenting references or sources.
- Students may often include a source/quote and then restate, explain, or describe the source’s claim; that is indicative of a Level 1 performance. To attain a Level 2, a student should begin to offer their own analysis or interpretation may not be enough to be coherent.

Influence of Context and Assumptions
- Successful students identify implicit or unstated ideas, conditions, or beliefs that are taken for granted within their own position or a position within evidence they may be using; that may include historical, ethical, political, cultural, environmental, or circumstantial conditions that influence the issue. Unsuccessful students have little to no awareness or ability to identify assumptions implicit within a position.
- This criterion focuses on the extent to which the student identifies, questions, and evaluates their own and others’ assumptions.

Student’s Position (perspective, thesis)
- Successful students acknowledge different sides, perspectives, and complexities of an issue when taking a position. Unsuccessful students state their position in a simplistic manner but do not express an understanding of other perspectives: the issue appears to be more "black and white."
- Assignments may not require students to take a firm persuasive position or make a direct argument; evidence of position may be found within assignments (at a micro level) that are more informative or compare/contrast in nature.

Conclusion and Related Outcomes
- Successful students base conclusions on the information, evidence, and positions they present and identify related implications of their conclusions. Unsuccessful students draw conclusions that are not clearly or logically based on the evidence or arguments they presented.
The VALUE rubrics were developed by teams of faculty experts representing colleges and universities across the United States through a process that examined many existing campus rubrics and related documents for each learning outcome and incorporated additional feedback from faculty. The rubrics articulate fundamental criteria for each learning outcome, with performance descriptors demonstrating progressively more sophisticated levels of attainment. The rubrics are intended for institutional-level use in evaluating and discussing student learning, not for grading. The core expectations articulated in all 15 of the VALUE rubrics can and should be translated into the language of individual campuses, disciplines, and even courses. The utility of the VALUE rubrics is to position learning at all undergraduate levels within a basic framework of expectations such that evidence of learning can be shared nationally through a common dialog and understanding of student success.

**Definition**

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

**Framing Language**

This rubric is designed to be transdisciplinary, reflecting the recognition that success in all disciplines requires habits of inquiry and analysis that share common attributes. Further, research suggests that successful critical thinkers from all disciplines increasingly need to be able to apply those habits in various and changing situations encountered in all walks of life.

This rubric is designed for use with many different types of assignments and the suggestions here are not an exhaustive list of possibilities. Critical thinking can be demonstrated in assignments that require students to complete analyses of text, data, or issues. Assignments that cut across presentation mode might be especially useful in some fields. If insight into the process components of critical thinking (e.g., how information sources were evaluated regardless of whether they were included in the product) is important, assignments focused on student reflection might be especially illuminating.

**Glossary**

*The definitions that follow were developed to clarify terms and concepts used in this rubric only.*

- **Ambiguity:** Information that may be interpreted in more than one way.
- **Assumptions:** Ideas, conditions, or beliefs (often implicit or unstated) that are "taken for granted or accepted as true without proof." (quoted from www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/assumptions)
- **Context:** The historical, ethical, political, cultural, environmental, or circumstantial settings or conditions that influence and complicate the consideration of any issues, ideas, artifacts, and events.
- **Literal meaning:** Interpretation of information exactly as stated. For example, "she was green with envy" would be interpreted to mean that her skin was green.
- **Metaphor:** Information that is (intended to be) interpreted in a non-literal way. For example, "she was green with envy" is intended to convey an intensity of emotion, not a skin color.

Critical Thinking VALUE Rubric

**Definition:** Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion. **Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet the Level 1 performance.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>0</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Usability of Sample</strong></td>
<td>No issues encountered.</td>
<td>There was a disconnect between the rubric and the assignment, e.g. student may or may not have performed well, but the assignment did not ask the student to perform in a manner expected by the rubric.</td>
<td>The student responded in a manner that interfered with reliable assessment of this outcome, e.g. student wrote much less than assignment required; or, poor writing skills interfere with assessing a non-writing outcome.</td>
<td>The assignment was not the common assignment expected for the course, e.g. entirely different assignment, excessively modified common assignment, mistaken alignment, or presented as not part of regular course grade.</td>
<td>This document was not accessible or not assessable: wrong file format, unable to open the file, illegible/unreadable, unexpected teamwork, or instance of plagiarism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Levels for this criterion are separate and distinct categories – not a scale.)</td>
<td>Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.</td>
<td>Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.</td>
<td>Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds unknown.</td>
<td>Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description.</td>
<td>Does not meet “Level 1” standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Explanation of issues</strong></td>
<td>Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation or evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly.</td>
<td>Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation or evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are subject to questioning.</td>
<td>Information taken from source(s) w/ some interpretation or evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are taken as mostly fact, with little questioning.</td>
<td>Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation or evaluation. // Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question.</td>
<td>Does not meet “Level 1” standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Evidence Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion</strong></td>
<td>Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.</td>
<td>Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.</td>
<td>Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).</td>
<td>Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.</td>
<td>Does not meet “Level 1” standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Influence of context and assumptions</strong></td>
<td>Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).</td>
<td>Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).</td>
<td>Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.</td>
<td>Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious.</td>
<td>Does not meet “Level 1” standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)</strong></td>
<td>Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order.</td>
<td>Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.</td>
<td>Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.</td>
<td>Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified.</td>
<td>Does not meet “Level 1” standards.</td>
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