

How to Adapt Thematic and Content-Oriented Courses to Meet the Critical Thinking Requirement

All general education Critical Thinking courses shall:

(1) *explicitly teach general rules and principles of critical thinking as such;*

(2) *explicitly and consciously apply these rules and principles to specific cases and examples with the aim of helping students understand fully what they involve.*

Although the pedagogy of some Critical Thinking courses will involve only these two tasks, and thus will require the employment of a broad range of Critical Thinking rules and principles; other, equally valuable Critical Thinking courses may concentrate on a specific “theme” or subject matter, to which a narrower (but still substantial) range of general Critical Thinking principles would be applied in more depth.

In Critical Thinking courses with a specific “theme” or subject matter, at least 1/3 of the course should be spent specifically on tasks (1) and (2) (not necessarily all at once, at the beginning of the semester). Thus, up to 2/3 of the instructional time in a Critical Thinking course (i.e., those with a specific “theme” or subject matter) can be spent on:

(3) *teaching the specific subject matter itself;*

(4) *giving guidance and feedback on projects involving the specific subject matter (e.g., argumentative essays or presentations).*

However, in Critical Thinking courses with a “theme” or subject matter, task (4) ought to be substantially affected by tasks (1) and (2) (i.e., by involving the conscious application of general Critical Thinking principles). Moreover, task (3) should make use of meaningful references to general Critical Thinking principles (e.g., in assessing specific controversies that exist in an area, or the credibility of sources, what is regarded as “established fact” and why, etc.).

Thus, the requirement that at least 1/3 of the course involve tasks (1) and (2) should not be understood to mean that the general Critical Thinking principles learned at those stages of instruction are not to be applied when relevant to the subject-matter specific tasks (3) and (4). In sum, for any Critical Thinking course with a specific “theme” or subject matter, Critical Thinking itself should be an overarching theme, pervading all aspects of the course.