

CRITO

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It has always been my nature never to accept advice from any of my friends unless reflection shows that it is the best course that reason offers. --- Socrates, in Crito

The Critical Thinker:

Such a person habitually seeks evidence and reasons, and is predisposed so to seek -- and to base belief and action on the results of such seeking. She applies the skills and abilities of reason assessment in all appropriate contexts, including those contexts in which her own beliefs and actions are challenged. --- Harvey Siegel, Educating Reason

CRITO (formed acronymically from the terms Conclusion, Reasons, Inference, Truth, and Objections) addresses both the principled reason assessment and critical attitude components of critical thinking, by requiring students to assess critically (carefully, impartially, consistently, logically, accurately, and relatively autonomously) their beliefs or claims. The individual elements of CRITO mirror the essential components of any cogent or sound inference and provide an effective outline for an argumentative or evaluative essay.

Creating a CRITO Outline

C: State a conclusion (or claim) (C). (C) ought to be explicit and clear, particular or singular, important and substantive (the object of possible or actual debate), truthful and accurate, and of genuine interest to the student. (See STEP-I handout below on producing a great "C.")

R: State reasons (R), premises, or evidence, sufficient to convince the reader of the truth (accuracy, reasonableness, and so on) of (C).

I: Test the inference (I), or argument, to ensure that reasons are sufficient to produce (C).

T: Test the truth (T) of (R), since even a valid or strong argument (that is, a valid or strong argument that passes the (I) test) may contain any number of false parts. Only the best (deductively sound or inductively cogent) arguments pass both the (I) and the (T) tests.

O: Construct the strongest imaginable objection(s) (O) to the argument. Finally, respond to the objection(s), making any necessary revisions to the original argument.

Format of CRITO Outline:

Name
Date
Course #
CRITO
Claim: -----
R1: -----
R2: -----
R3: -----
(Etc.)
Objection: -----
Response to Objection: -----

Relation of CRITO Outline to Final Essay

A CRITO outline, along with a STEP-I worksheet, produces merely the rough content for an essay, the exact form of which ought to follow the guidelines for producing one page essays and will be determined by the effort, talent, and imagination of its author. (Note: only the content of stages **C**, **R**, and **O** will be noticeable in both the outline and final essay. **I** and **T** are logical tests designed solely to strengthen the overall argument of the essay.) A full-length description and defense of the method is available in the Philosophy Common Room or Library.

STEP-I

How to produce a great "C" for a CRITO outline

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Step one in producing an argumentative essay - deciding exactly what to write about -- is perhaps the most important. A great essay usually begins with a great "C". Step-I is an acronym formed from five stages of "C" production - **selecting** a topic of interest and ensuring its **truthfulness, explicitness, particularity, and importance**.

1. Selection. If there is choice allowed, select (S) from the range of possible topics 2 or 3 that interest you the most. The best writers focus on topics that intrigue them, that they know something about, or that they enjoy. List your selections here:

a.

b.

c.

Consider briefly the remaining steps below, and choose one topic that best seems to fit those steps.

Write the topic you have chosen in the form of a **claim** to be defended or rejected in the box below:

Claim:

Revision

Revision:

Revision:

Final Revision:

2. Truthfulness. "C" must be as accurate or truthful (T) as possible. "A market-oriented Internet should reflect consumer demand" is better than "Communism is nothing but a liberal scheme designed to make us all think and look alike." An error-free "C" is the only kind worth defending. Revise the claim in the box above if necessary.

3. Explicitness. "C" should be explicit (E), clear, and straightforward. Read the claim aloud, and have others read it, too. It is clear and obvious to you (and to others) what you are claiming? Remove any ambiguities, vagueness, or ungrammatical elements. Could the claim be shortened without loss of meaning? "Clinton lied to protect his family from embarrassment" is better than "Sex is the root of all evil." Revise the claim if necessary.

4. Particularity. "C" ought to be particular (P) or singular, making only one point about one thing or event. "Reagan initiated the arms-for-hostages deal" is better than "All politicians are liars." Sometimes it helps to avoid complexity and quantifiers like "all" and "every." Revise the claim if necessary.

5. Importance. "C" should be an important (I) topic of debate. Controversial, substantive claims about matters of interest to more than one person often produce the most interesting essays. "Affirmative action is inconsistent with the use of quotas" is better than "The Dolphins are the team to beat this year." Revise the claim if necessary.