

DePaul University  
School for New Learning

Syllabus:  
**LL 155 Critical Thinking**  
Spring 2009

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Day/Time: Saturdays, 3/28 – 6/6, 9AM – 12 noon  
Location: Oak Forest campus, room TBA  
Credit hours: 4

**Competencies offered:**

L-5—Can analyze issues and reconcile problems through critical and appreciative thinking.

**Course description:**

This course aims to a) make students aware of their own thinking processes; b) help them develop those processes; and c) help them bring those processes to bear on college-level intellectual activity. This involves an emphasis on the skills and strategies of critical thinking and reading as well as practice in the recognition, construction and evaluation of arguments. In pursuing these goals, we touch on principles of logic, strategies of persuasion and techniques of propaganda. The course presents a variety of readings, exercises and projects designed to help students develop competence in the following areas: identifying assumptions, connecting assertions to evidence, stating generalizations, analyzing arguments and bringing multiple perspectives to bear on complex issues.

**Faculty biography:**

John Kimsey received his Ph.D. in English from the University of Illinois at Chicago. His teaching and writing interests include modern literature and popular music. A member of the SNL resident faculty, he serves as Associate Professor with tenure and as the school's coordinator for Critical Thinking .

**Criteria for demonstration of competence:**

In addition to homework, in-class exercises and discussion, there are four major pieces of work in the course:

a Personal Narrative essay;

a set of take-home Exercises on Induction, Deduction and Propaganda Devices;

a detailed Argument Analysis;

and a quarter-long project called Play On A Word (to be explained in class).

In assessing work like that described above, I strive to be clear, flexible, forthright and empathetic.

**Expected outcomes:**

By the end of the course, students should

--be able to identify claims and assess their fit with reasons;

--be able to distinguish among different kinds of reasons adduced to support claims;

--be able to distinguish between reports, inferences and judgements;

--be able to identify common rhetorical strategies, propaganda devices and logical fallacies;

--be able to recognize, construct and make evaluative distinctions among different kinds of arguments;

--be able to examine experiences with critical scrutiny;

--be able to discuss the roles played by perception, emotion and belief in shaping views;

--be able to recognize problems and limitations inherent in linguistics discourse;

--be able to appreciate, engage with, and make use of viewpoints other than one's own.

**Learning tools:**

Required texts:

Chaffee, John. *Thinking Critically*. 9<sup>th</sup> edition. Houghton Mifflin, 2009.

ISBN 0618947191

Additional materials will be made available through the E-Reserve services of DePaul Library.

**Learning strategies:**

A variety of learning strategies will be employed, including textbook readings, class discussions, informal lectures, film screenings, individual and group exercises, dialogues and papers.

### **Grading Basis: Pass/Fail or Letter Grade Option**

It is assumed students will take SNL's Critical Thinking course on a Pass/Fail grading basis (i.e., PA or F). If you are enrolled in the course then the grade roster already lists you as taking the course on the Pass/Fail basis. Most of the courses in SNL's Lifelong Learning Area are set up this way. However, if you like, you may elect to take Critical Thinking for a letter grade (i.e., A, B, C, D or F) instead. If you're interested in taking the course for a letter grade, you should discuss the matter with your instructor. (You want to choose the option that's best for you.) *If you wish to take the course for a letter grade, you must notify the instructor of your wish to do so by the start of Week 3 of the quarter.*

You should be aware that if you choose the letter grade option in this course, then the grade you receive (whether A, B, C, D or F) will impact your grade point average in the standard fashion. On the other hand, if you take the course on the Pass/Fail basis and you receive a Pass grade, then there is no impact on your grade point average. Finally, if you take the course on the Pass/Fail basis and receive a Fail grade, then you receive negative credit.

### **Meaning of Pass/Fail and Letter Grades**

Each of the major assignments in the course has its own mini-rubric for assigning points. Speaking generally though, the following descriptions apply:

Work assessed as A or Pass with high marks is characterized by *thorough and thoughtful engagement* with the material, superior comprehension of key concepts and exceptionally fluent, college-level writing. Work that is "thoughtfully engaged" covers the basics but goes beyond them by a) drawing insightful connections; b) raising incisive questions; and c) making well-supported evaluations, inferences or arguments.

Work assessed as B or Pass with good marks is characterized by *thorough engagement* with the material, good comprehension of key concepts and fully fluent, college-level writing. Work that is "thoroughly engaged" covers the basics and applies them aptly and consistently while providing the occasional provocative connection, relevant question or well-supported evaluation.

Work assessed as C or Pass with adequate marks is characterized by *engagement* with the material, comprehension of key concepts and mostly fluent, college-level writing. Work that is "engaged" covers the basics and applies them aptly without going beyond them.

Work assessed as D or Fail with mostly low marks is characterized by *low engagement* with the material, comprehension of few key concepts and writing that is intermittently fluent. Work that is "lowly engaged" occasionally covers the basics and attempts to apply them with limited success.

Work assessed as F or Fail with overall low marks is characterized by *poor engagement* with the material, incomprehension of key concepts and writing that lacks fluency. Work

that is “poorly engaged” covers few or no basics and attempts to apply them without success.

### **Points**

The course assignments are given point values as follows, with the total possible points being 100:

<i>Personal Narrative</i>	15 pts
<i>Exercises</i>	35 pts
<i>Argument Analysis</i>	25 pts
<i>Play on a Word</i>	25 pts

Note: Point totals aside, you must complete all the assignments to get credit for the course.

### **Grading Scale in points**

91 -100	A or Pass with high marks
81- 90	B or Pass with good marks
71- 80	C or Pass with adequate marks
61- 70	D or Fail with mostly low marks
60 or lower	F or Fail with overall low marks

### **Policy on Academic Integrity:**

All work done for this course must observe the Guidelines for Academic Integrity as outlined in the *Code of Student Responsibility* (in the *DePaul Student Handbook*). For the code’s Plagiarism Policy, see attachment at end of syllabus.

### **Policy on Incompletes:**

See attachment at end of syllabus.

**Schedule of Topics, Readings and Assignments:**

Note: (E) = item is available on E-reserve at DePaul Library website, at <http://library.depaul.edu>. When you get to the DePaul Library page, click on “Course Reserves”. Then type “Kimsey” into the Search window and when the Kimsey page comes up, click on the title of this course. The password is LL155.

**Week One** 3/28

Introduction to course.

Nacirema exercise

Cultural myths and critical thinking

The power of stereotypes

*Personal Narrative essay (“The Conventional Wisdom”) assigned*

*Play On A Word project (Part I) explained and assigned*

**Week Two** 4/4

Perceiving, Believing, Knowing and Inferring

Perception exercise

Discussion of Chaffee readings

Listening exercise

Discussion of Play On A Word topic-choices

Readings: Chaffee, chapter 4, “Perceiving and Believing”, pp. 117-124; 135-148

Chaffee, chapter 5, “Constructing Knowledge,” pp. 164-177; 187-189

**Week Three** 4/11

Rhetoric and Argumentation: Constructing and Analyzing Arguments

Deductive and inductive reasoning

In-class exercises

*Take-home exercises on Induction, Deduction and Propaganda Devices assigned.*

***Personal narrative essay due.***

Readings: Chaffee, chapter 10, “Constructing Arguments”

**Week Four** 4/18

Logic, Rationalism and Its Discontents: A Brief Historical Overview

Plato’s Psychology as (Problematic) Map of the World

Persuasion and Manipulation: Common Propaganda Devices and Logical Fallacies

Readings: Chaffee, chapter 11, “Reasoning Critically”

Lavine, “The Tripartite Soul” (E)

Pratkanis & Aronson, “Our Age of Propaganda” (E)

**Week Five** 4/25

Reasoning about an issue and opposing perspectives on it

Moral reasoning

*Argument Analysis paper assigned*

***Take-home exercises due***

Readings: Chaffee, pp. 193-202; 307-329

Erikson, “Of Accidental Judgments and Casual Slaughters” (E)

**Week Six** 5/2

Rhetorical Analysis: Close reading for the ‘What’ or content; Close reading for the ‘How’ or rhetorical purpose; Opposing perspectives on a controversial topic --Vidal and Rosenthal; Armentano and DuPont

***Play on a Word Part I due***

Readings: DeBenedictis, “Parents: It’s OK to Limit Viewing” (E)

Vidal, “Drugs” (E)

Rosenthal, “The Case for Slavery” (E)

**Week Seven** 5/9

The Nets of Language

Language, perspective and framing: Four accounts of the assassination of Malcolm X

Discussion of Orwell on political language: Relevant Today?

Kenneth Burke and the terministic screen

In-class discussion of Take-home exercises

Readings: Chaffee, chapter 6, “Language and Thought,” pp. 206-218; 232-239

Chaffee, pp. 124-128, “Four Accounts of the Assassination of Malcolm X”

**Week Eight** 5/16

In-class work by teams: Debate exercise, based on Argument Analysis papers

*Part II of Play On A Word exercise introduced*

***Argument analysis paper due***

**Week Nine** 5/23

Defining and exploring concepts

The dialogue as exploratory writing genre

Readings: Chaffee, chapter 7, “Forming and Applying Concepts”

***Draft of Play On A Word Part II due***

**Week Ten** 5/30

Moving forward: Critical Thinking, Empathy and Empowerment

Plato, The Parable of the Cave (as read by Sidney Poitier)

Milgram’s study of “destructive obedience”

*Drafts of Play On A Word returned*

Readings: Sabini & Silver, “Critical Thinking and Obedience to Authority”

(in Chaffee, chapter 11, pp. 418-425)

**Week Eleven** 6/6

No class meeting

***Revision of Play On A Word Part II due***