

Second Edition

Skillful and Critical Thinking

Have you noticed that most EAP texts claim to teach critical thinking skills but that in reality they do little more than ask students to discuss their opinions with one another?

Wouldn't it be sensible if the critical thinking skills and associated language became more important and complex as the EAP syllabus progresses, taking students from lower order skills like language telling through the explaining stage and onto the highest order persuading functions?

Wouldn't it be helpful if students were given step by step guidance on the development of higher order skills in such areas as analysis (how to break ideas down into various parts), synthesis (reconstructing the analysis in new ways) and evaluation (making judgements from what has been learned)?

Wouldn't it be much more effective if an EAP text followed stages (such as in Bloom's taxonomy) and progressed gradually from lower order to higher order thinking skills?

If you just caught yourself thinking “definitely!”, then **Skillful** is a series that you will appreciate. **Skillful** practices low order thinking skills at the lower levels and progresses towards higher order thinking skills at the highest levels. This development logically goes hand in hand with the development of language skills as the expression of higher order thinking skills is more linguistically demanding.

Of course, **Skillful** recognizes that EAP students already know how to exercise critical thinking in their everyday lives. However, it is essential to teach these skills in an EAP context as the extent to which students are in the habit of using their thinking skills in the context of learning will be variable. **Skillful** therefore leads students to an understanding of the contexts in which critical thinking skills are valued, what kinds of thinking are relevant in academic study and how to express these thinking skills in English.

Repeated practice is crucial and so every unit of **Skillful** has at least one critical thinking exercise. The sequencing of activities is carefully planned over the series syllabus, ensuring that students gain confidence in their critical thinking skills, starting immediately at lower levels using simple skills. As students progress through the course, they encounter more complex thinking tasks which are made manageable as they are broken down into smaller steps and sub-skills (see examples on following pages). Through this approach, students become able to see the whole process and how recognizing sub-skills allows them to successfully complete critical thinking tasks.

If you are committed to teaching critical thinking skills, **Skillful** is the best textbook to be using in your EAP classroom.

E Critical thinking

1 Discuss these questions in a group.

- 1 Which quality from the text do you think is the most important?

I think ... is the most important quality because ...

- 2 Name a leader with that quality. Can you name one without it?

I think ... is a leader who ...

2 Write short answers to these questions.

- 1 Do you think you have the qualities of a great leader?

- 2 What quality of a leader do you want to have? Why?

E Critical thinking

1 Decide if you agree or disagree with each of these statements.

- 1 Social media makes people feel anxious and depressed.
- 2 Social media makes people want everything now.

2 Compare your opinions in groups and give your reasons.

Critical thinking

Recognizing contradiction

Sometimes a speaker presents an argument, a piece of evidence, or an idea that seems to disagree with something else they said. If the ideas presented are so different that they cannot both be true, this is called a **contradiction**.

The development of DNA testing has led to lower crime rates

The rise of crime in the area means we need DNA testing more than ever.

(The crime rate cannot be increasing and decreasing at the same time.)

Forty-eight percent of the American public are worried about identity theft

Over two thirds of Americans are concerned about having their identity stolen.

(These statistics are different and cannot both be true.)

Recognizing points that contradict each other will help you to evaluate the strength of an argument.

CRITICAL THINKING

- 1 Work with a partner. Read the extract from a lecture on iris recognition and answer the questions.

Iris-recognition technology is an incredibly reliable form of identification. In fact, recent studies suggest that it's ten times more accurate than fingerprinting, only producing an incorrect result once every two million tests. It also works with clear contact lenses, glasses, and non-mirrored sunglasses. However, we should remember that it is still a relatively new technology and many commercial scanners can be tricked by high-quality images of a person's face. For this reason, we cannot rely on iris-recognition software in all situations.

- 1 What is the contradiction in the extract?
 - 2 Does this strengthen or weaken the speaker's argument? Why?
- 2 Circle the option that contradicts each sentence.
 - 1 Students waste precious time exploring new ideas.
 - a Students take required classes their first year.
 - b Students benefit from taking a variety of classes.
 - 2 Using biometrics is the best way to confirm identity.
 - a There are limits on the usefulness of biometrics to identify people.
 - b It's increasingly important to establish people's identity in certain situations.
 - 3 In a group, discuss why it is important to recognize contradiction in society as a whole.

Critical thinking

Making counter arguments and concessions

Making counter arguments and including concessions are effective ways to strengthen your own argument.

By including and dealing with opposing views in the form of counter arguments, you anticipate objections, demonstrate you have considered the issues in depth, and provide strong support for your own conclusions.

A counter argument may highlight a disadvantage of the argument you propose, or give an alternative explanation that seems to make more sense. Such opposing arguments are often introduced with a signpost phrase or question, e.g., *However, it could be said that ...*, *Some people argue that ...*, *Admittedly, ...*, *But isn't this just ...?*

To then deal with the counter argument, demonstrate how or why the counter argument is incorrect or how it is less important or probable than your argument. Avoid stating a counter argument without refuting it.

Concessions show respect and consideration for the opposing views, by acknowledging some positive features of them, e.g., *They are correct in the sense that ...*, *While we agree that ...*

1 Match the two sets of arguments, counter arguments, and refutations.

The main reason is that women are choosing careers.

Performance doesn't change easily, and studies support the theory of the effect of role conflict.

Fathers face conflict with their roles, so we cannot conclude it is the woman's choice.

The promoted worker's performance went down due to role conflict.

The issue of declining birth rates is too complex to identify one cause.

The promoted worker's performance went down due to laziness.

2  **10.3** Listen to the extracts from the lecture and check your answers to Exercise 1.

3 Work in pairs. Use the ideas below to make an argument.

Having many roles ...

Conflict is good when ...

Avoiding conflict is ...

Roles need to be ...

4 With your partner, prepare a counter argument for each statement. Include it in your sentence, together with an attempt to rebut it.