

Critical Thinking AS (AQA)

What is the Critical Thinking Department like?

Presently, we number two, very enthusiastic teachers.

What is the course about?

Thinking critically is a fundamental academic competence akin to reading and writing. Most teachers aim to develop their students' critical thinking ability – the ability to interpret, analyse and evaluate ideas and arguments – but they do this incidentally, in the course of teaching their special subject (e.g. History, Sociology, Economics or whatever). This course aims to improve these thinking skills, but to do so by attending to them **explicitly** and teaching them in ways, which enable students to **transfer** them to other academic studies and to everyday life.

What sort of work will I be doing?

This will be a predominantly “skills-based” course. Students will study “the language of reasoning” (*therefore, because, so, if...then, reason, conclusion, evidence, opinion, inference, support, prove, refute, fallacy*) and notions which can be useful in argument (e.g. *consistent, contradiction, converse, counter-example, valid, entail/imply, hypothetical, necessary and sufficient conditions*), learning how to assess and apply them where necessary. Different forms and standards of reasoning will be studied.

Students will evaluate examples of reasoning, using appropriate language, and assessing the credibility of sources. Whilst this may **sound** rather dry, the AS in Critical Thinking actually allows real freedom in the use of materials from a wide variety of real sources and should allow students to sharpen their ability to argue effectively (a propensity which so many students have!) in this and their other chosen subjects. As the syllabus says “... *students spend most of their time arguing...*”. The point is, though, to argue effectively.

Critical Thinking AS is an ideal 5th AS level subject for students with a sound GCSE background. It is particularly pertinent for students considering Oxbridge entrance, Law and Medicine as Higher Education courses.

How will I be assessed?

Unit 1 Assessment

Candidates will be assessed by means of a written paper lasting 1 hour and 30 minutes. The question paper will be based on a source booklet containing several short documents which may be accompanied by images and/or graphics. These will relate to a single topic or issue, or two or more related

topics, and consist of background information and argument. One or more of the documents will be a debate or discussion, or exchange of views. The question paper will have two sections, A and B. Section A will require short written answers, assessing a range of skills and understanding summarised in the Specification: 3.1–3.14. Not all the points in the list will necessarily be addressed by a specific question in every examination. There are two main categories of question in this section. The first sets specific tasks or questions, such as: ‘Identify an implicit assumption...’ or ‘Is there a flaw...?’. Questions in the other category are more open and require candidates to select for themselves the point (or points) which are most relevant. These typically ask the candidate to: ‘Comment critically ...’ or ‘Critically evaluate...’ Section B will comprise one or two questions which give candidates the opportunity to present their own reasoning on a subject related to the stimulus materials. No specialist knowledge of the subject matter will be assumed; nor will such knowledge give any advantage to candidates.

Unit 2 Assessment

Candidates will be assessed by means of a written paper lasting 1½ hours. The exam will be based on a set of source documents presenting information, either on a single topic or two closely related topics. Between them the documents will present data in a range of forms: verbal, numerical, graphical. The question paper will consist of two sections, A and B. Section A will contain a number of questions requiring short written answers. Candidates will engage in: extracting and interpreting information, assessing claims and conclusions, drawing inferences, and offering explanations. Section B will present candidates with a short statement or proposal related to the examination topic(s), which they will be invited to argue for or against. Both sections of the paper will require candidates to draw on skills from Unit 1 as well as Unit 2.

What are the progression routes with this qualification?

Critical Thinking at present is a stand alone AS qualification and the option to progress to the full A2 is being considered. It complements other subjects, especially in the Humanities and Social Sciences, and will provide evidence of important competences for UCAS and employment applications. It is also possible for students who opt to an AS level in CT during their first year to complete an extended project qualification (EPQ) during their second year of study.

What extra work can I do?

Wide reading will be helpful. New materials are presently being published enable you to develop your thinking skills and provide support where it is needed. I would recommend that you should also try to read a quality newspaper at least once a week.

Your teachers will issue guidance on supplementary reading for the course, to enable you to achieve their full potential.