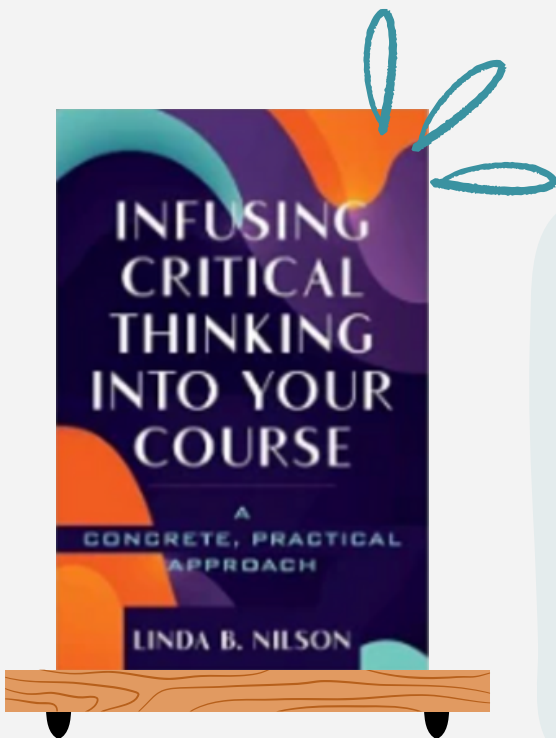


Infusing Critical Thinking Into Your Course Discussion Guide

The OTL Book Club read and discussed *Infusing Critical Thinking Into Your Course: A Concrete, Practical Approach* (Nilson, 2021) in Fall 2022. You can use this document to guide your own reading or start a book club with colleagues. These questions were written by educational developers from the Office of Teaching and Learning at the University of Guelph to help facilitate discussions.



About This Book

*In **Infusing Critical Thinking Into Your Course**, Nilson argues that critical thinking is a key life skill that can be incorporated into any course. The book leads the reader through the process of developing critical thinking learning outcomes, effectively teaching critical thinking skills, and assessing critical thinking using multiple-choice and constructed response questions. The book also includes a useful appendix of discussion activities that can promote critical thinking.*

Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: Promoting Critical Thinking To Your Students



1. Nilson argues that students often need to be convinced of the value of critical thinking. How could you show students the value of critical thinking in your courses?
2. *Infusing Critical Thinking Into Your Course* was published in 2021, before the proliferation of generative AI chatbots like ChatGPT. How has the way you teach and assess critical thinking changed, if at all?



Discussion Questions

Chapter 2: The Critical Thinking Literature

1. Which critical thinking theory or theories did you find most convincing and why?
2. Did you recognize your typical students in any of Susan L. Wolcott's step-based developmental model of critical thinking? How have you helped students develop the skills to move up the critical thinking ladder?

Chapter 3: Ten Reasons Why Teaching Critical Thinking is So Challenging

1. The author argues that certain courses are more suited to teaching critical thinking because they focus on teaching students to evaluate 'claims' instead of memorize 'facts.' What claims are important in the courses that you teach?
2. Given that students (and all people) are motivated to resist questioning their own beliefs about how the world works, what instructional strategies could you use to help students practice this skill?

Chapter 4: Formulating Critical Thinking Learning Outcomes

1. Does your course include any learning outcomes that directly address critical thinking? If so, what verbs (e.g., analyze, predict, infer, etc.) do the outcomes include?
2. Does your course currently include any outcomes related to self-regulated learning? If not, are you tempted to add any based on this chapter?

Discussion Questions

Chapters 5 – 7: Teaching Critical Thinking Skills

1. Nilson suggests that instructors encourage students to reflect frequently by justifying their answers, journalling, or engaging in a ‘Think Aloud’ activity, for example. What new strategy for encouraging reflection will you try in your classroom?
2. Do you use the Socratic Method of questioning in your courses? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of this method for students’ development of critical thinking skills?
3. Will you try any of the suggested teaching methods to encourage critical thinking (e.g., discussions, debates, case studies, simulations)? If you already use these methods, what do you like about them?

Chapters 8 – 11: Assessing Critical Thinking Skills

1. The author suggests that instructors can assess critical thinking skills using objective assessments (e.g., multiple-choice or true/false) when the questions include a stimulus like a table, graphic, passage of text, etc. What type of stimuli are used in your discipline? Where could you find (or how could you create) sample stimuli for assessments of critical thinking?
2. Do you typically use rubrics to assess students’ work in your courses? What are the advantages and potential disadvantages of using rubrics?
3. Have you ever used specifications grading, or do you know a colleague who has? Are you tempted to try this type of grading after reading Chapter 11? Why or why not?



Infusing Critical Thinking Into Your Course

Suggested Teaching Strategies

Suggested Strategies

Infusing Critical Thinking Into your Course contains a diverse array of strategies to help create a supportive and impactful classroom environment for your students. Below we have selected a few strategies highlighted in the book alongside their respective page numbers. We encourage you to dive deeper into the book and explore the larger collection of useful strategies and techniques to transform your classroom.

Strategy

Description

Page

Illustrate the Incompleteness of Your Field	Share examples of alternative views, conflicting research findings or conclusions to students.	16
Use the Socratic Method of Teaching	When a student answers a question or voices their opinion, respond with a question that weakens the students answer and allows them to respond and develop their understanding.	74
Thinking Time	Give students time to write down ideas or reflect before responding to a question you have asked them.	131

Pinch Points	Allow students to identify and discuss with other students challenging concepts from lecture.	132
Anonymous Contributions	To increase participation and encourage students to answer honestly allow students to respond to discussions in an anonymous way.	133
Opening Activities	Start the class by having students summarize, explain and/or briefly reflect on previous class material before moving forward.	133
Discussion Ground Rules	Work with students to develop ground rules for supportive, inclusive discussion etiquette to follow when interacting with one another.	134