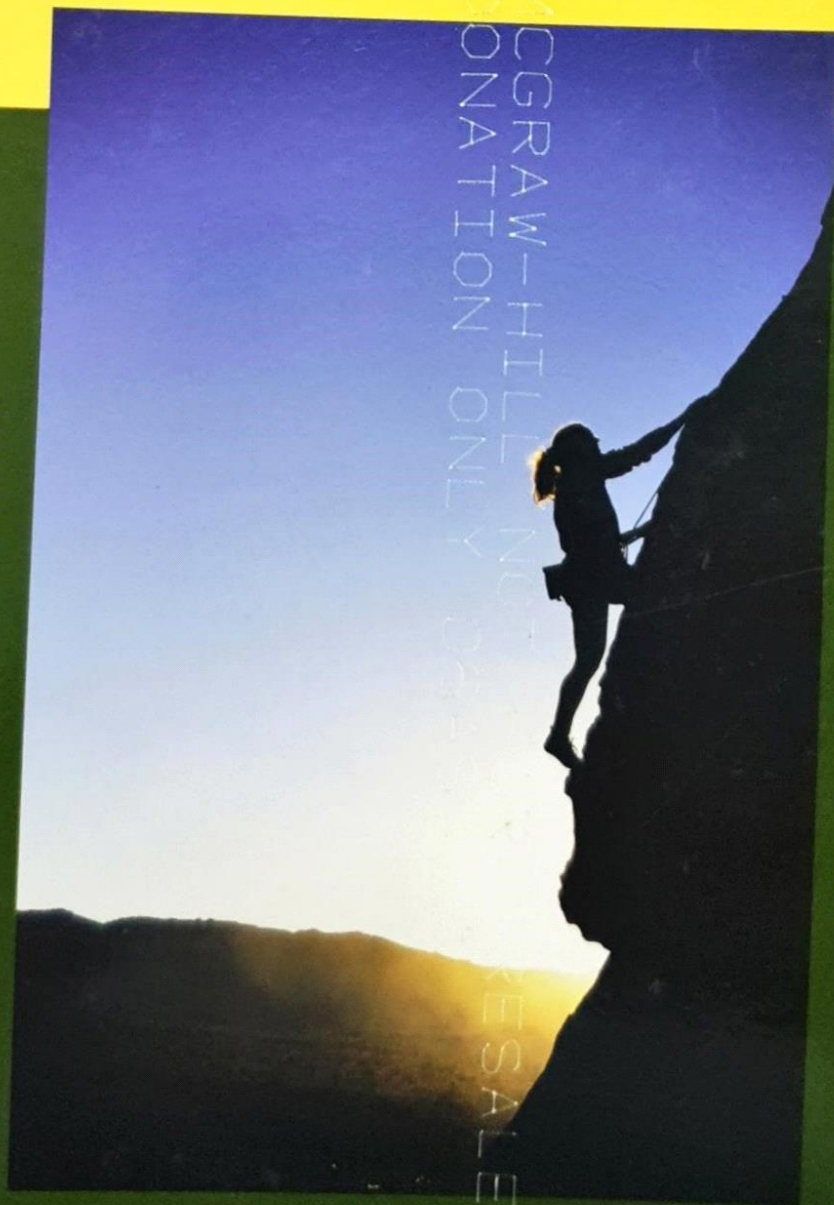


FOURTH EDITION

# CRITICAL THINKING

A STUDENT'S INTRODUCTION



BASSHAM | IRWIN | NARDONE | WALLACE



# CRITICAL THINKING

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## A STUDENT'S INTRODUCTION

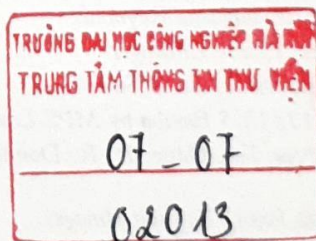
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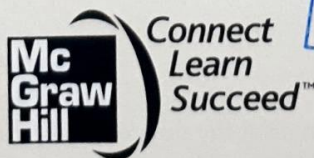
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# A WORD TO STUDENTS

Let's be honest. Very few of your college textbooks will change your life. But this one truly can.

This book will make you a better thinker. It will sharpen your mind, clarify your thoughts, and help you make smarter decisions.

We'll teach you—step by step—how to analyze issues, reason logically, and argue effectively. *With effort on your part*, this book will hone the thinking and reasoning skills you need to succeed in college, in your career, and in life.

Critical thinking is what college is all about. College is not about cramming students' heads with facts. It's about teaching students to think. And that's precisely what this book is designed to do. It will help you develop the skills and dispositions you need to become an independent, self-directed thinker and learner.

Collectively, the four authors of this textbook have been teaching critical thinking for over 60 years. Teaching critical thinking is what we do. It's our passion. We've seen how critical thinking can change lives.

But you'll only get out of this course what you put into it. Becoming a critical thinker is hard work. Sometimes working through this book will feel a little like boot camp. There's a reason for this: No pain, no gain. Becoming a master thinker means toning up your mental muscles and acquiring habits of careful, disciplined thinking. This requires effort, and *practice*.

That's why the heart of this textbook is the exercises. There are lots of these, and all have been carefully selected and class-tested. You need to do the exercises. As many as you can. (Or at least all that your instructor assigns.) Do the exercises, then check the answers at the back of the book. Practice. Make mistakes. Get feedback. And watch yourself improve. That's how you'll work the mental flab off and develop lasting habits of clear, rigorous thinking.

Critical thinking is an adventure. Becoming mentally fit is hard work. And thinking independently can be a little scary at times. But in the end you'll be a smarter, stronger, more confident thinker.



## CHAPTER 1

# INTRODUCTION TO CRITICAL THINKING

This book is about the power of disciplined thinking. It's about learning to think for yourself and being your own person. It's about the personal empowerment and enrichment that result from learning to use your mind to its fullest potential. In short, it's about critical thinking.

Critical thinking is what a college education is all about. In many high schools, the emphasis tends to be on "lower-order thinking." Students are simply expected to passively absorb information and then repeat it back on tests. In college, by contrast, the emphasis is on fostering "higher-order thinking": the active, intelligent evaluation of ideas and information. This doesn't mean that factual information and rote learning are ignored in college. But it is not the main goal of a college education to teach students *what to think*. The main goal is to teach students *how to think*—that is, how to become independent, self-directed thinkers and learners.

*The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically.*

—Martin Luther King Jr.

## WHAT IS CRITICAL THINKING?

Often when we use the word *critical* we mean "negative and fault-finding." This is the sense we have in mind, for example, when we complain about a parent or a friend who we think is unfairly critical of what we do or say. But *critical* also means "involving or exercising skilled judgment or observation." In this sense critical thinking means thinking clearly and intelligently. More precisely, **critical thinking** is the general term given to a wide range of cognitive skills and intellectual dispositions needed to effectively identify, analyze, and evaluate arguments and truth claims; to discover and overcome personal preconceptions and biases; to formulate and present convincing reasons in support of conclusions; and to make reasonable, intelligent decisions about what to believe and what to do.

Put somewhat differently, critical thinking is disciplined thinking governed by clear intellectual standards. Among the most important of these intellectual

*The purpose which runs through all other educational purposes—the common thread of education—is the development of the ability to think.*

—Educational Policies Commission