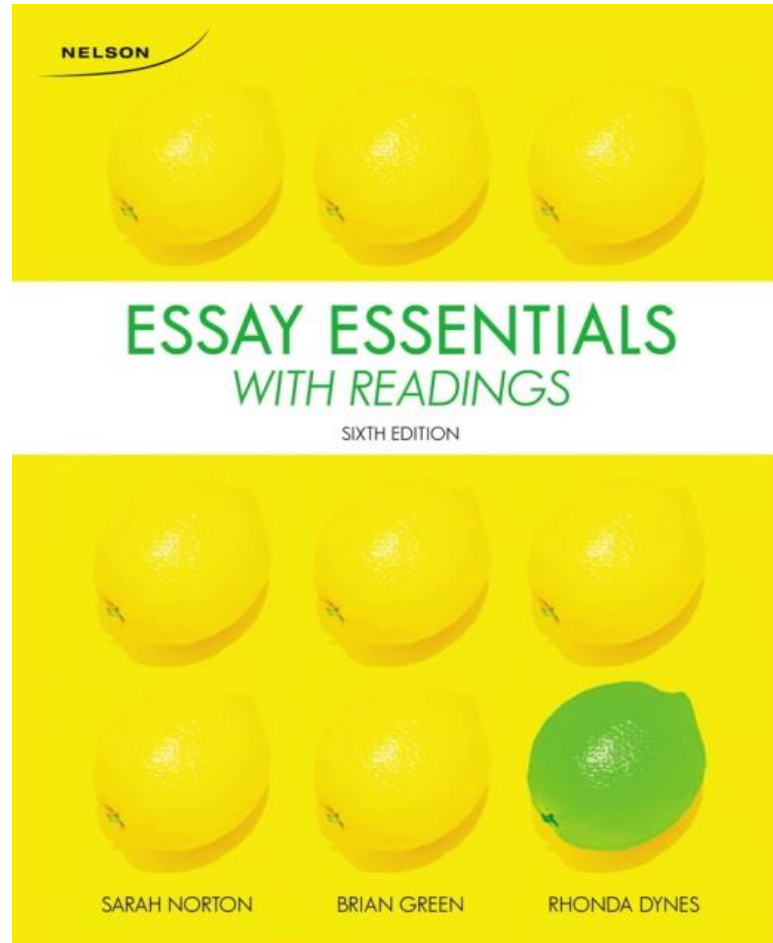


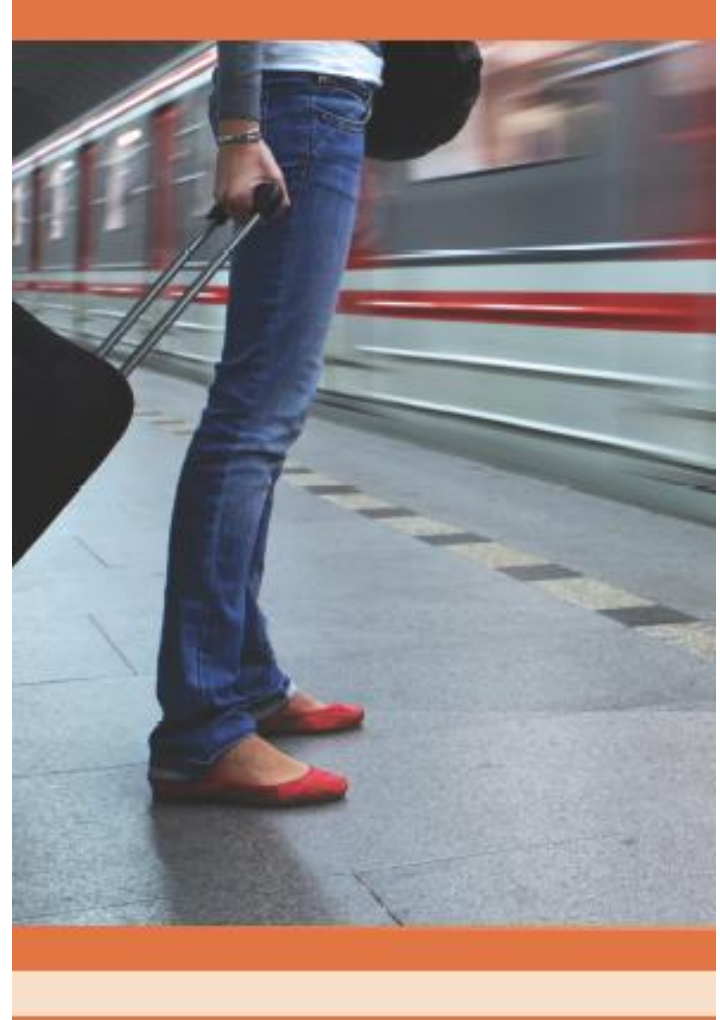
NETA PowerPoint® Slides

to accompany



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Understanding the Role of Critical Thinking



Critical Thinking

As a writer, thinking about your audience is a critical task—*critical* referring to the idea that you are delving below what is on the surface, not in the sense that you are being negative.

Critical thinking is the means through which we analyze, or do close readings of, people, situations, and writing.



The Interpretive Critical Thinking Model

The following are 10 aspects of the model:

- the main point
- the supplementary messages
- the context
- the author's point of view
- the assumptions and bias
- the facts and theories
- the themes and keywords
- the logic and methods
- the relationship to other works
- reflection on your own ideas

What Is the Main Point?

The first question will help you find the thesis or main idea.



In general, the main point is contained in either the introduction or the conclusion of the text you are analyzing. It is important to examine all parts of the text, though, to get a true sense of its message, as some writers do bury the main point rather than stating it right up front.

What Are the Supplementary Messages?

The second question will help you identify the issues discussed in the text.



For your own critical analysis, make a list of supplementary messages in order to get a sense of the topics the author discusses. At this point, you might also make a note of what is missing from that list. Is there something you would think should be included but isn't?

What Is the Context?

The third question will help you understand the background of the text you are reading.



Context is about situating the argument in the geographical, political, and social location of the time, as well as considering any information you have about the author.

What Is the Author's Point of View?

The fourth question will help you understand what is included and what is left out of a text.



Remember to keep an open mind when you are reading—the point of critical thinking is to listen to the author's point of view, to consider the arguments presented, and then, in light of your analysis, to decide on your own opinion, whether it remains what it was before you read the piece or it has changed.

What Are the Assumptions and Bias?

The fifth question will help you identify the way the author sees the world and the assumptions that he or she makes about that world.



Once you understand the author's assumptions and biases, you can assess whether the author's viewpoints align with your own ideas and beliefs. And even if you disagree with the author's position, you can still comment upon the validity of the argument or the expertise with which the piece was written.

What Are the Facts and Theories?

The sixth question will help you understand the supports the author uses for the argument they make.



The author of the work you are reading may use **facts** (statistics, percentages, or readily available and accepted data) and **theories** (academic ideas or systems applied to different subjects, such as feminist theory or Freudian theory) to support his or her ideas.

What Are the Themes and Keywords?

The seventh question will help you identify the words that jump out at you.



This list might also include words that you aren't familiar with but that appear to be important to the work. It will also likely include those words that get repeated throughout the work.

What Is the Logic and Methods?

The eighth question will help you understand the author's way of thinking.



Most logic is about interpretation of facts, statistics, or ideas. And interpretation is an art, rather than a science. One area of logic that it is important to understand is the role of fallacies—pseudo-arguments that authors use to try to get you to respond in a certain way but that don't hold up to testing.

Some Logical Fallacies

The Slippery Slope

“If we allow you to have one cookie, you will likely eat the entire bag.”

The Straw Man

“Well, of course John hates multinational food corporations; he believes we should have a small grocery store on every block and have to pay \$100 for a loaf of bread.”

The Red Herring

“I know that exercising is healthy, but what can I do to avoid junk food?”

Ad Hominem

“I would love Toronto’s commitment to equity, if it weren’t for all the dirty politicians.”

What Is the Relationship to Other Works?

The ninth question will help you avoid taking anything on its own as the only opinion on an issue.



We don't want just one opinion on a subject; we want many facts, opinions, and ideas so that we can come up with our own views on the issues presented. One way that writers can help readers reach their own conclusions is by using various sources in their work.

How Does This Reflect on Your Own Ideas?

The tenth question will help you consider where your own thoughts fit in.



What you want, though, is always to come back to your ideas *in light of* what you have read and experienced and to see how those filters change your view (or not).

Using the Critical Thinking Interpretive Model

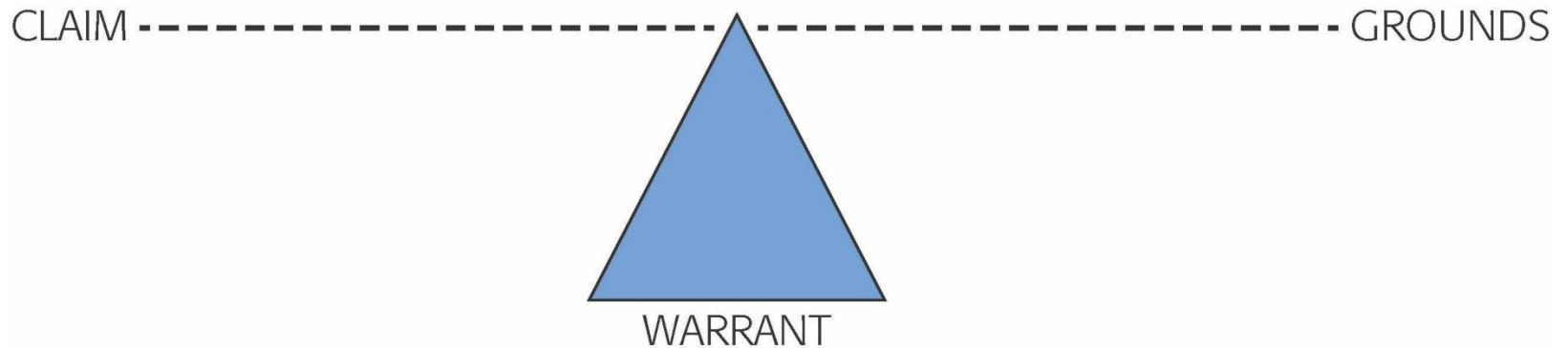
THE CRITICAL THINKING STEP	WHAT TO DO
1. The main point	Find the author's thesis and conclusion.
2. The supplementary messages	Find the author's main points—either listed in the thesis or in the main paragraphs or in various sections of the work.
3. The context	Research the author, the issues, and the time period in which the work was created.
4. The author's point of view	Look for personal opinions, examples, or anecdotes that make the author's intentions or ideas clear.
5. The assumptions and bias	Look for opinions or ideas that the author holds that might be contentious. Look for evidence of ideas that you or others might disagree with.
6. The facts and theories	Look for any statistics, stated facts, or use of other theories or ideas that form a basis for the author's argument.
7. The themes and keywords	Look for generic ideas or key statements or phrases the author relies on heavily. In a book, look in the index or table of contents.
8. The logic and methods	Look for evidence of "if x , then y " issues. What is the author's reason for thinking or arguing the way he or she does?
9. The relationship to other works	Read other works on the same topic and look at any listed references that the author used. Do the references look at a variety of views or focus on only one opinion?
10. Reflection on your own ideas	Consider your own opinions and think of what the author didn't discuss. Do you have any lingering questions or doubts, or are you convinced by what the author has said?

The Toulmin Method of Analysis



This method is useful because it is easy to use on everyday arguments such as those we might read in a magazine, journal, or newspaper. It requires breaking down an argument into six basic parts in order to understand what the author's main idea is and how logical the supplementary points are.

The Claim, Grounds, and Warrant



A **claim** is also called the *argument* or *thesis*—essentially, it is why the point is being made. The **grounds** are the evidence, the reasons, or the facts, statistics, and so on that are used to back up the claim. A **warrant** is an assumption of what the relationship is between the data and the claim.

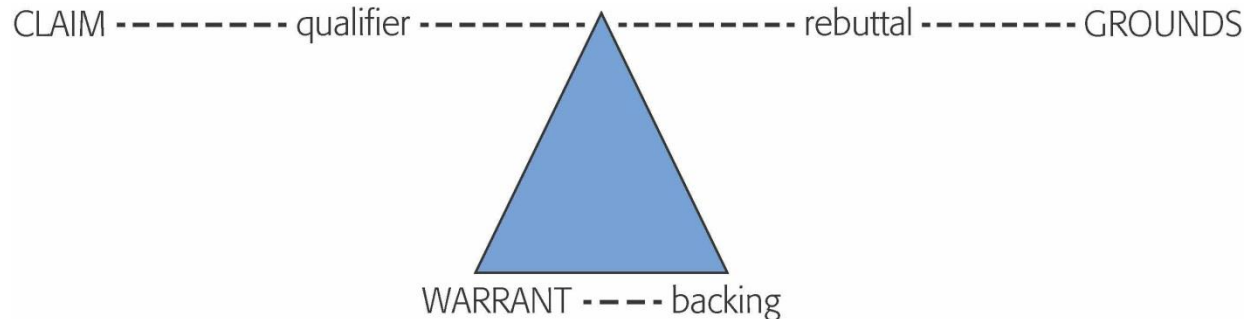
Three Types of Grounds

- 1. Data-based.** Grounds are often based in the presentation of facts or evidence.
- 2. Credibility-based.** In this case, credible (believable) witnesses or authorities are used to back up points.
- 3. Analytic or reason-based.** Evidence can be offered on the basis of its reasonableness, the degree to which it appears logical.



The Backing, Qualifier, Rebuttal

The Toulmin model includes three other parts: the backing, the qualifier, and the rebuttal. These parts allow you to analyze the strength of the argument (or claim) that is being made.



The Backing, Qualifier, Rebuttal cont'd

The *backing* is the support or reasoning to back up the warrant.

The *qualifier* is the limit or conditions of the claim and warrant.

The *rebuttal*, a term that you might be familiar with from debating, is any exception to the claim, and a description and discussion of any counterarguments to the claim itself. Dealing with these counterarguments strengthens our own argument.

Summary

- By using your knowledge about your audience when you are writing, and through careful reading and close analysis of arguments, you have the ability to create a logical and persuasive piece of writing that can be clearly understood.