

Definitions of Key Words Used in the Critical Thinking Intensive Seminar*

Analysis: Examining something by separating a whole into smaller parts to study it.

Argument: A statement aimed at persuading others to accept an idea/hypothesis by justifying and explaining it. Arguments support hypotheses, on a selected issue.

Assess: To determine the value, significance, or extent of something.

Assumption: Something that is taken for granted without evidence.

Concept: A general idea. Something formed in the mind; a thought or notion.

Conclusion: A judgment or decision reached after deliberation, based on research, arguments, premises, and evidence.

Critical: Analyzing on the basis of a standard; a standard for judging. (Definition from Mayfield, 1994.)

Evaluate: To examine and judge carefully.

Evidence: Information that is helpful in forming a conclusion or judgment, and which validates a general hypothesis, an argument, and premises supporting it.

Fact: Information presented as objectively real and true.

Hypothesis: A tentative explanation or point of view which can be tested by research and investigation. Something taken to be true for the purpose of argument or investigation. Written as a statement rather than a question.

Inference: The act of reasoning from factual knowledge or evidence. Deriving logical conclusions from premises known or assumed to be true.

Knowledge: To perceive; grasp in the mind with clarity or certainty. To have a practical understanding of.

Logic/Logical: Reasoning which is found to be valid based on earlier other otherwise known statements or conditions.

Premise: A statement which supports an argument, and is presumed true for the purposes of arguing to a conclusion.

Reasoning: To form conclusions, inferences, or judgments based on facts/information.

Research Question: A subject or point phrased neutrally in the form of a question, to guide studying and learning.

Research: Scholarly or scientific investigation or inquiry. To study a topic in sufficient breadth and depth to allow it to be comprehended and shared with others in a detailed and accurate manner.

Skill: Proficiency, advanced degree of competence, or dexterity that is acquired through training or experience. A developed talent.

Synthesis: Examining something by combining smaller separate parts into a coherent whole, in order to study it.

Theory: Accepted principle or rule of procedure which has been studied and found useful and able to assist people in analyzing, predicting or explaining the nature or behavior of a certain phenomenon.

Thinking: Exercising the power of reasoning.

* These definitions have been paraphrased from The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (third edition), 1996, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co; unless otherwise noted.