

# GE SLO S4: Think Critically About Concepts in Multiple Disciplines

## Basic Level

### College Composition (ENG 1030 and 1031/1032)

Semester: FALL 2013

REPORT DATE: 1/8/2014

Critical thinking in College Composition is assessed based on an argument essay written by the student using the AACU Critical Thinking Rubric. The program's goal is that 70% of students will perform at level 2 or higher on the critical thinking rubric.

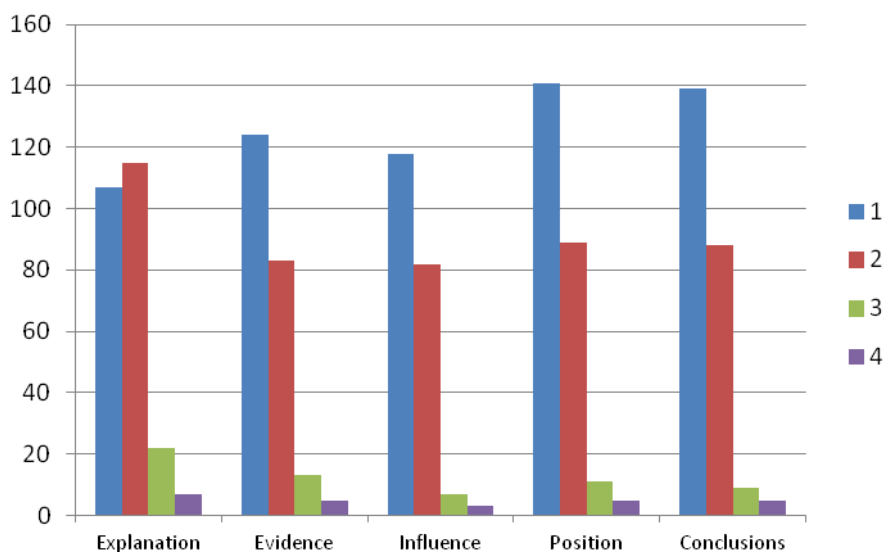
College Composition helps students develop flexible processes for composing writing to meet academic purposes across the curriculum. Both ENG 1030 and 1031/1032 have the same course objectives; the only difference is in the time students are given to meet them. Students in ENG 1031/1032 meet for double the amount of class time than ENG 1030. College Composition follows a set course calendar, where all sections are supposed to move through the same four genres (summary/response, argument, analysis, and reflection/portfolio) at the same time. The program has shared definitions for the genres, and faculty are allowed to construct whatever prompt they wish as long as it meets the shared definition. See the Appendix for more information on the guidelines for the argument genre.

(Note: some of the essays were earlier drafts than others, with the later drafts generally having received instructor feedback that was meant to improve the quality of the argument. Due to time constraints, we did not separate out essays by their stage in the process.)

**Number of students:** 259  
(205 from ENG1030 and  
54 from ENG1031/10320)

**Number of sections:** 19  
(15 for ENG 1030; 4 for  
ENG 1031/1032; this  
represents approximately  
the same proportion of  
sections for each type of  
course offered in the Fall  
semester). Different  
numbers of essays were  
read from each section.

#### Distribution of Scores



**Mean scores overall:**

Category	Score
Explanation	1.7
Evidence	1.4
Influence	1.3
Position	1.4
Conclusions	1.4

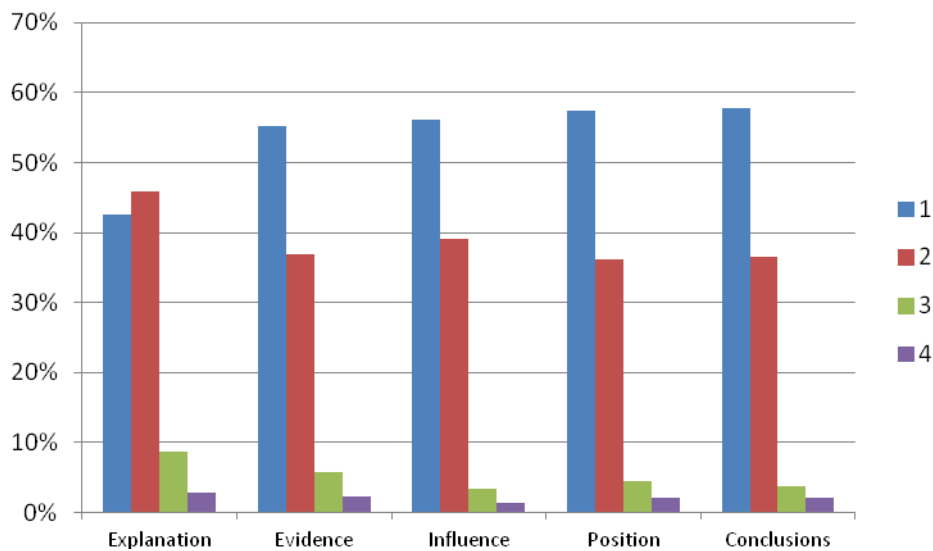
**Distribution of Scores:**

	Explanation	Evidence	Influence	Position	Conclusions
<b>1</b>	107	124	118	141	139
<b>2</b>	115	83	82	89	88
<b>3</b>	22	13	7	11	9
<b>4</b>	7	5	3	5	5
<b>total</b>	251	225	210	246	241

**Percentage distribution**

Percentages of score

	Explanation	Evidence	Influence	Position	Conclusions
1	43%	55%	56%	57%	58%
2	46%	37%	39%	36%	37%
3	9%	6%	3%	4%	4%
4	3%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Level 2-4	57%	45%	44%	43%	42%



**Analysis:**

The program's goal is that 70% of students will perform at level 2 or higher on the critical thinking rubric.

Students performed the best on explanation (Mean 1.7, 57% reached level 2-4), followed by Evidence (1.4, 45%), Position (1.4, 43%) and conclusion (1.4, 42%). Influence is the lowest among all (1.3) with only 4% met level 3-4.

### **Discussion/Action/Closing the Loop:**

Overall, the mean scores are in the area the Composition program expected them to be for students in a freshman-level course, with almost all students performing in the 1-2 range. Students seem to be strongest in the explanation category (mean 1.7, 57% reached level 2-4). In assessing this category, we focused on how well they framed the issue in the introduction of their essay. Based on the results given here, we did not meet the percentage goal set above. However, this is the first year we have attempted to gather systematic data on critical thinking, so it seems best to consider these results as a baseline which we can use as a model to plan further growth.

Students showed less skill in the position (1.4, 43%) and conclusion (1.4, 43%) categories, and some of the readers commented that the main problem seemed to involve presenting and responding to viewpoints that challenged their theses. It was decided that more class time would be spent on helping students learn to accurately present opposing viewpoints and respond to them in ways that created a more nuanced argument. As most of the readers are also teaching College Composition this semester, I assume they have begun to work on this issue in class, though at the time this report was prepared, the course calendar indicated classes would not begin working on argument until February 11.

### **Appendix A**

We examined students' argument essays. Teachers can design their own prompt for this assignment, as long as it meets the following genre requirements:

Definition: Argumentative writing takes a specific position on a subject and attempts to persuade readers their position is valid.

Conventions of an argumentative writing:

- an appropriate topic (note: arguable topics allow people to possess different opinions on the topic, though they must share at least one point of agreement. Non-arguable topics are based on personal taste or preference, or they cannot be resolved by means appropriate for an academic context.)
- a clear position. In academic writing, the stance is usually laid out in a thesis, though not always.
- a set of reasons stating why the writer's position is valid.
- evidence used to support the reasons. The evidence should be appropriate for the audience and context, and the evidence must include a researched component. The exact number of sources, citation system, and other elements are up to the instructor,
- awareness of opposing viewpoints. These opposing viewpoints can be responded to in multiple ways: acknowledgement, accommodation, and refutation.

(Note: some of the essays were earlier drafts than others, with the later drafts generally having received instructor feedback that was meant to improve the quality of the argument. Due to time constraints, we did not separate out essays by their stage in the process.)

## Appendix B AAC&U Critical Thinking Rubric

### CRITICAL THINKING VALUE RUBRIC

for more information, please contact [value@aacu.org](mailto:value@aacu.org)



#### Definition

Critical thinking is a habit of mind characterized by the comprehensive exploration of issues, ideas, artifacts, and events before accepting or formulating an opinion or conclusion.

*Evaluators are encouraged to assign a zero to any work sample or collection of work that does not meet benchmark (cell one) level performance.*

	Capstone	Milestones		Benchmark
	4	3	2	1
<b>Explanation of issues</b>	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated clearly and described comprehensively, delivering all relevant information necessary for full understanding.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated, described, and clarified so that understanding is not seriously impeded by omissions.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated but description leaves some terms undefined, ambiguities unexplored, boundaries undetermined, and/or backgrounds unknown.	Issue/problem to be considered critically is stated without clarification or description.
<b>Evidence</b> <i>Selecting and using information to investigate a point of view or conclusion</i>	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a comprehensive analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are questioned thoroughly.	Information is taken from source(s) with enough interpretation/evaluation to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are subject to questioning.	Information is taken from source(s) with some interpretation/evaluation, but not enough to develop a coherent analysis or synthesis. Viewpoints of experts are taken as mostly fact, with little questioning.	Information is taken from source(s) without any interpretation/evaluation. Viewpoints of experts are taken as fact, without question.
<b>Influence of context and assumptions</b>	Thoroughly (systematically and methodically) analyzes own and others' assumptions and carefully evaluates the relevance of contexts when presenting a position.	Identifies own and others' assumptions and several relevant contexts when presenting a position.	Questions some assumptions. Identifies several relevant contexts when presenting a position. May be more aware of others' assumptions than one's own (or vice versa).	Shows an emerging awareness of present assumptions (sometimes labels assertions as assumptions). Begins to identify some contexts when presenting a position.
<b>Student's position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis)</b>	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is imaginative, taking into account the complexities of an issue. Limits of position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) are acknowledged. Others' points of view are synthesized within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) takes into account the complexities of an issue. Others' points of view are acknowledged within position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis).	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) acknowledges different sides of an issue.	Specific position (perspective, thesis/hypothesis) is stated, but is simplistic and obvious.
<b>Conclusions and related outcomes (implications and consequences)</b>	Conclusions and related outcomes (consequences and implications) are logical and reflect student's informed evaluation and ability to place evidence and perspectives discussed in priority order.	Conclusion is logically tied to a range of information, including opposing viewpoints; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is logically tied to information (because information is chosen to fit the desired conclusion); some related outcomes (consequences and implications) are identified clearly.	Conclusion is inconsistently tied to some of the information discussed; related outcomes (consequences and implications) are oversimplified.