

Introduction to Critical Thinking

GEN 110
(Erion)

Critical thinking is the rational analysis, composition, and evaluation of *claims* and the *arguments* that support them. To cultivate good critical thinking habits, it helps to become comfortable with a set of *critical questions* like the one below.

(1) If a claim *is not supported* by an argument:

- (A) Is it expressed in *vague, ambiguous, distorted, or misleading language*?
- (B) Does it come from a *reliable source* (a respected expert, a trusted reference work or news outlet, etc.)?
- (C) Does it *conflict with any other claims* (of experts, ordinary experience, etc.) *that we should have reasonable confidence in*?

(2) If a claim *is supported* by an argument:

- (A) What are the argument's *premises*? What is its *conclusion*?
NB: terms like 'therefore' and 'so' often appear just before conclusions, while terms like 'since' and 'because' often appear just before premises.
- (B) *Are the premises true* (or at least, are they *reliable*)?
- (C) *Do the premises provide adequate support for the conclusion*?

You can facilitate the development of your critical thinking skills by pursuing these kinds of questions as you complete your assignments and participate in class discussions this semester.