



General Certificate of Education

Critical Thinking 1771

CRIT1

Unit 1 Critical Thinking Foundation Unit

Report on the Examination

2009 examination - June series

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CRIT1

Unit 1 AS Critical Thinking Foundation Unit

General comments on assessment policy for CRIT1 and CRIT2

Examiners are instructed to adopt a positive-marking approach. In broad terms what they are looking for is evidence that the candidate can reason critically, and has sufficient grasp of the required concepts (listed and explained in the specification) to demonstrate that ability. There are some questions which simply have a right, or most plausible, answer; although just as often there is scope for alternatives. Thus, even if a candidate comes up with an answer that is not among those credited by / suggested in the mark scheme, credit is given if the above criteria are met. For example, consider a 2-mark question for which the credited answer is:

‘Conclusion C is not justified (1) because it assumes a causal connection where there is only a statistical correlation (1).’

If a candidate answered that there is (some) justification for C because the correlation is so strong that it is reasonable to infer a causal relationship, it would be clear that the relevant concepts were being applied in a critical way, and some or all of the marks would be awarded (depending on how reasonable the inference was and/or how strong the correlation.)

In keeping with this policy, there is no requirement for candidates to write at length or to elaborate beyond what is needed to answer all parts of the question. Indeed, an important skill to acquire in critical thinking is the confidence to answer crisply and economically and to avoid redundancy. In the above example no extra credit is available for going on to give a list of alternative explanations for C unless these are asked for in the question, and doing so will merely use time better spent on other questions.

Nor is there a *requirement* for answers to be given in stylistic, elegant or polished prose. Although the ‘quality of written communication’ is taken into account (especially in the Section B responses on both papers) this requirement is fully met if meaning is clearly conveyed in standard English.

Finally there is no requirement to use technical terminology, other than when it is specifically referred to in the question. Knowing a technical term can assist a candidate in answering succinctly, but it is not obligatory to do so. If the point in question can be made in plain, non-technical terms the full range of marks is accessible.

In summary, it is understood that this is an intellectually challenging subject, and that the associated ideas are often difficult to articulate. Marks are not awarded unless a candidate has shown understanding of the question and related concept(s), but benefit of the doubt is applied where a candidate is obviously on the right track but has struggled to convey an idea precisely. It is critical *thinking* that is being assessed.

General

For the first session of the new specification, it was felt that candidates performed admirably. The topic seemed to engage candidates’ interest, the accompanying Source Documents appeared to be both challenging yet accessible, and even the weakest candidates had plenty to say when it came to Section B. Most candidates attempted most of the questions, producing answers that were generally relevant, effective and even sometimes insightful. While there was some misreading of questions, it was pleasing that the majority of responses – where candidates were not restricted by the use of technical or semi-technical language (see comments on subject knowledge below) – showed clear understanding of the nature of the task required. Candidates were mostly able to distinguish, for example, between where evaluative

comments were required and where not. All candidates recognised that, where questions asked them to explain their answer, an explanation was a necessary condition for scoring marks. It was pleasing to see that the full range of marks was very nearly obtained by the cohort, with some strikingly good scripts getting close to 100%. Where there was room for improvement it was felt that candidates could benefit best from either a little more training in the subject itself, or from greater attention to exam technique and time management.

Subject knowledge

There was sadly evidence of centres where candidates had received little or no teaching, with the result that candidates' marks rarely rose above the 20s or perhaps low to mid 30s. Candidates who evinced otherwise good reasoning skills were unable to obtain any marks on questions where knowledge of specific terminology was required. There was also evidence of candidates having been given technically inaccurate definitions which hampered their scores on certain questions (see comments on 2(e) below). Few candidates understood what is meant by a 'general principle'; surprisingly few showed understanding of what is meant by an 'analogy', which is a fairly basic term in critical thinking. Where questions named specific flaws, candidates were rewarded for showing knowledge and understanding (implicitly or explicitly) of what the flaw meant in a general sense, even if they were unable to apply it correctly to particular case. Where questions were phrased more openly, for example questions 4 and 5, candidates could gain full marks without using names of specific fallacies as long as their assessment was clear; however, a correctly identified flaw would merit a mark even if the explanation was poor; and a correctly identified flaw that was clearly explained would pick up 2 – 3 marks fairly quickly.

Time management and exam technique

The majority of candidates managed to complete the paper in time, and to allow time to write a full answer to Section B.

Having said this, there was a tendency to write too much for the shorter questions. Candidates must not feel that they need to use up all of the space in their answer books, and should be aware of the number of marks available, and consequently the time they ought to spend (a rough guide is a mark a minute). With more open questions, candidates should realise that they can gain full marks for a 4 mark question, for example, by making two crisp points of analysis/evaluation, or even just one if it is suitably developed.

1 or 2 mark questions in particular could be answered very briefly, often in a short phrase or sentence. Where only 1 mark was available, examiners gave the benefit of the doubt to answers that were ambiguous but could be interpreted as having identified what the question was looking for. Where two marks were available, examiners expected a little more precision for both available marks – not necessarily a fuller or more developed answer.

With Section B, candidates should take care to follow all parts of the task. Some candidates wrote well but sadly failed to follow the specified requirements (e.g. responding to issues or arguments in the source documents); this often restricted marks to the extent that a more pedestrian argument that covered the task fully scored as well as a more imaginative or nuanced one that omitted parts of the task. (See comments on individual questions below).

Comments on some individual questions

Section A

Q2(c): This question was problematic, largely because many candidates seemed to have no understanding of what was meant by an analogy. Candidates were rewarded for showing understanding of what was meant by an analogy, even if the analogy was imperfectly understood. Many candidates grasped intuitively the thrust of Lucy's analogy, and what it implied about the attitude of the drugs companies, even if they failed to see it or discuss it as an analogy but instead as e.g. an allegation ('Lucy is saying that the drugs companies are forcing drugs onto people when they don't really need them in order to make a profit. This is fair because... etc'). Where this was the case, candidates were given some credit for understanding the implications of the analogy, and then credit according to the strength of their evaluation in the same manner as candidates who had correctly identified the analogy.

Q2(d): Few candidates understood what was meant by a general principle, which meant that they failed to score on this question even if they successfully identified an implicit assumption in the argument. Many candidates seemed to think that a general principle was equivalent to a general (empirical) statement, for example, 'Lucy needs to assume that natural alternatives to anti-depressants always work'. Any answer that carried the sense of a principle and that captured the general gist of the assumption merited a mark, even if the expression was a little awry; for example 'She needs to assume that drugs for children is evil and shouldn't be done'.

Q2(e): Surprisingly few candidates got full marks for this. A significant number had clearly not been taught or not learnt what was meant by a straw man, with references to 'scarecrows' worryingly not uncommon. Some had been taught, but taught imprecisely, to the extent that they felt that a straw man was 'where you focus on a weakness in/ on the weakest part of the opposing argument'. This slight error resulted in some highly articulate but nevertheless wrong answers. Any answer that showed a clear understanding of what a straw man was merited a mark, even if they did not identify the straw man in the passage. Most if not all the candidates who identified the correct part of the passage earned themselves full marks, as all that was needed was a brief comment such as 'this is unlikely to be what the doctors or drug companies would say' by way of explanation (this was sufficient to show that they understood what the flaw meant as well as why it was relevant here).

Q4: Candidates scored fairly well on this question, many producing more than was they needed to for the 8 marks (see Comments on exam technique above). There were also long answers that wobbled off-topic and that, despite their length, failed to merit full marks. Most candidates realised that the question was asking them to focus on the part of the exchange reprinted in the question; however, some drifted off to other areas of the dialogue, criticising the points Jenny was making for being irrelevant to the issue of childhood depression; the dispute at this point of the exchange was not about this, so candidates failed to merit marks for raising this objection.

To get full marks for their explanation of her reasoning, candidates needed to do more than copy out the claims Jenny gave; they needed to explain how the reasoning worked. The simplest way to do this was to summarise the overall point she was making, i.e. the conclusion she was implying, and then explain that everything else she said was intended to support this. They would then need to explain how the exclamation of 'Nuclear bombs!' was relevant to the support she was giving.

In terms of evaluation, candidates were credited for sensible critical comment, favourable or otherwise, either by considering how warranted were the assumptions (explicit or implicit), or whether or not they gave convincing support for her overall (implied) conclusion.

5: Most candidates scored a minimum of one or two marks on this question. Some candidates wasted time and space repeating or explaining what either Nick or Jenny was saying, occasionally without offering any critical comment at all (and therefore scoring no marks for the question). Many candidates instinctively went for this being a case of ‘ad hominem’, citing Nick’s use of ‘you’ to suggest or argue that he was attacking Jenny and not her argument. To really make this case convincingly, they needed to show how Nick was trying to expose a hypocrisy in Jenny’s position. They then needed to consider the fairness of this approach in this context (perhaps her hypocrisy is *relevant* to the debate: if she is advocating a stance that is unrealistic, then her failure to take this stance herself helps illustrate this). Better answers tended to opt for Nick deploying a straw man version of what Jenny was saying, or that he was limiting the options, or was using a slippery slope. An appropriate flaw merited a mark by itself. By providing a convincing case for their chosen flaw students could use a single flaw to acquire most if not all marks. Many students however used a combination, with brief justification/ explanation for each, to build up their score towards full marks.

6: This proved to be one of the most difficult questions, with many candidates getting less than half marks for the question as a whole.

Q6(a)(i): Recognising possible ambiguity and/ or clarifying meaning is an important skill in critical thinking, and candidates should not be surprised to see questions like this which ask about the potential confusion surrounding the different meanings of a word or phrase within a given context. Many candidates, however, thought the question was just asking how the word ‘right’ could be ambiguous in general, not, as the question asked, ‘in the penultimate sentence’. Therefore candidates suggested that the word right could mean ‘as in human rights’, or ‘her right to argue’, which in the context it clearly does not. Where candidates happened to hit on one of the right answers through this approach, they were credited, but few if any managed the two marks without thinking about the way the word was used in context. Those who stayed closer to the passage fared better, obtaining marks for suitable accounts of one or other of the possible meanings, such as ‘position to argue’ or ‘having good reasons’.

Q6(a)(ii): Surprisingly, some candidates managed to obtain a mark here, despite failing to get any marks in part (i); this is presumably because, with this part of the question, they were forced to think about the way the word was working in context (identifying a meaning that they had not identified as either, or any, of the possible meanings they had put forward for (i)). More often than not, candidates failed to score on this question.

Q6(a)(iii): Unlike Questions 3(a) and 3(b) which almost all candidates got right, this was a difficult assumption question and few candidates obtained both of the available marks. What the examiners were looking for was an assumption that did not just corroborate the argument but was required for the conclusion to follow. So for example, many candidates offered answers like ‘He’s assuming that there are not other things that have got worse’. Answers like this merited a mark, as they point towards the important assumption: that being alive outweighs all other considerations when determining quality of life. Technically speaking, he does not need to assume that there are not other things that have got worse, but it is clear that the candidate’s thinking is heading in the right direction!

Q6(b): Most candidates who attempted this question scored fairly well. There was no right or wrong answer; candidates were judged on how convincing a case they presented either way. Some candidates misunderstood the question, thinking for example that it had asked for an

evaluation of Jenny or Nick's overall position. In addition to the suggestions in the mark scheme, candidates were able to achieve good scores, in many cases full marks, for simply explaining how Nick's final argument (in their view) *did* boil down to living longer, and therefore Jenny was correct in this part of her analysis, but that it did not consider the issue of increasing wealth, and therefore her analysis was only part correct.

Q7(a): Most candidates obtained the mark for this question. Benefit of the doubt was given to overstatements which, had the question been worth two marks, would only have merited one (for example : 'He's implying that the Media only ever report bad things and never good things').

Q7(b): As with the other flaw questions, credit was given to candidates who showed understanding in their response of what a generalisation in reasoning meant, regardless of their verdict or the grounds they gave. Most candidates agreed with the assessment, obtaining either two or three marks according to the accuracy with which they justified this (for example, just saying he had 'insufficient' evidence would obtain them two marks, but recognising that he was using two separate examples – the attitude to the recent UN report compared to the older reports, and the attitude to the news about the global temperature – and then explaining why this was insufficient for him to imply his general conclusion merited three). Some candidates bravely defended the author's generalisation, arguing that the two examples provided strong evidence, and that, from their experience (and due to e.g. market forces and human interest), the generalisation was well-founded; such answers typically scored well, often obtaining full marks.

Q8: Candidates fared well on both parts of this question, with most who attempted it scoring over half the marks available and many six or seven out of nine, or even more. There was evidence of candidates using skills learnt in GCSE (or for those that were studying it, A level) English, to obtain marks here, using words or phrases like 'emotive', 'connotation', 'lexical choices', 'quoting directly from the original'. Occasionally candidates failed to score on part (a) by comparing and contrasting the content of the reports rather than the author's presentation of them; such responses however constituted a small minority. Most seemed clear with the thrust of the question, and produced good crisp answers that earned either two or three out of three. The best answers for part (b) judged that the author's presentation was not fair; but some candidates scored well by arguing that the UN report deserved to be taken more seriously on the grounds that it was more recent and (consequently, probably) more neutral.

Section B

Q9: This was an accessible topic, and all candidates who allowed time to tackle it picked up marks for what they wrote. Examiners were pleased with the quality of written expression, and some excellent arguments were presented, candidates clearly seeming to enjoy the topic and have plenty to say.

How marks were awarded:

Examiners followed the marking grid, allocating marks for each part of the task as follows:

Stating their conclusion clearly

To obtain full marks, candidates needed to take a clear position which directly 'answered' the 'question'; the stated conclusion also needed to follow logically from the argument. (Some candidates gave a clear conclusion, but one that came something as a surprise after an argument which presented both sides as having equal merit; they could have obtained full

marks if their conclusion had taken account of this, for example concluding that it was impossible to determine satisfactorily either way). The conclusion could come at any point, and many of the stronger arguments consolidated their position by rephrasing it on more than one occasion.

Strength/ quality of reasoning

Candidates need to realise that it is not only the number, or presence, of reasons they provide, but the quality. Reasons need to be clearly relevant; the fewer the unwarranted assumptions they make, explicitly or implicitly, the better. Candidates can avoid unwarranted assumptions by taking care not to jump to conclusions, and instead show more carefully the significance of their reasons by drawing careful inferences. Poorly drawn or unsafe inferences ('The number of people who are literate is increasing. This shows that education has improved') will weaken the score for their reasoning.

As well as considering the actual significance of the individual reasons or evidence they provide, they need to make clear the significance of lines of argument. When anticipating counter-arguments, candidates need to make it clear what their impact on their overall argument is. They need to signal, implicitly, or explicitly, the relative strength of the counter-argument. They need to either give an adequate rebuttal of a counter-argument (i.e. not merely asserting that it is weak/ inconsequential, but arguing why this is the case), or show how, if at all, the counter-argument(s) has modified their overall position. Examiners were often left wondering, after a series of strong counter-arguments had been presented, whether or not we were still supposed to be clinging to the original thesis, or whether or not we were now considering a more nuanced position that reflected the strength of the counter-arguments.

Marks for reasoning were banded according to the grid in the generic mark scheme.

Criteria

While it was not necessary to use the word 'criterion' or 'criteria' – equal credit was awarded for synonymous expressions such as 'The most important thing in my mind is...' – there were many candidates who failed even to do this. Where possible, examiners gave benefit of the doubt to candidates and awarded a mark, for example, for an intermediate conclusion that summarised the main lines of argument, or what they appeared to think were their strongest points.

Sometimes criteria were mentioned but they were very vague/ unclear how they could be applied. With the topic being so broad, vague criteria were acceptable (candidates could argue that quantifiable criteria for example are less relevant in this context), but candidates needed to show awareness of the problematic nature (i.e. potential vagueness) of their criteria where this was the case in order to obtain full marks.

Use of source documents

Candidates who took care to follow this part of the task picked up easy marks; however they needed to do more than just repeat material from the documents in order to get into the top band. Marks were awarded for simply touching on topics or issues raised in the documents (even if there was no explicit reference to any of the Documents themselves); further marks were awarded for both using the materials critically (e.g. questioning the credibility of a speaker, or the significance of a piece of information) and making clear reference to the Document and what it contained – 'As Nick says in Document B, ...'.

Marks for the use of the source documents were banded as follows:

- Where candidates touched on topics raised in the texts, but without making any direct reference to the texts themselves, and without making any critical comment, candidates were in the 1-2 mark band.
- Where candidates either repeated large chunks of material but offered little by the way of critical assessment, or made some effort to engage critically with the materials but perhaps did so too thinly, selectively or perhaps their reference to the specific documents was muddled or unclear, they were placed in the 3-4 mark band for this criterion.
- Where candidates made clear reference to materials from the source documents and used them critically, i.e. by questioning their credibility or by evaluating their significance for their argument or the counter-argument, candidates were placed in the 5-6 band.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.