



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Critical Thinking**

**CRIT1**

**(Specification 2770)**

**Unit 1: Foundation Unit**

***Report on the Examination***

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## CRIT1 AS Critical Thinking Foundation Unit

### General Comments from the Principal Examiner

Before commenting on the treatment of each individual question, I'd like to briefly outline the overall response of candidates to the exam paper.

It was good to see that most candidates had time to finish the paper without omitting any questions. They clearly engaged with the material and felt they had something valid to say on each question.

However, despite this, candidates found it a little more difficult to score marks than in previous CRIT1 papers. The main reason for this lies in the almost universal misunderstanding amongst candidates of what Question 10 was asking them to do, (more on this later), and the consequent loss of marks here.

### Commentary on the Questions

#### Question 1

This question asked candidates to "Identify two predictions that the article makes." (Document A).

But it was amazing the variety of answers we got which needlessly risked losing the marks. To 'identify' all that is required is for candidates to simply pick out and copy word for word what has been said, but nearly all felt they had to embellish or paraphrase what was said, probably for fear of appearing not to be thinking for themselves. But the thing is, the thinking is in the correct identification itself; they don't need to do anything extra.

For example, one of the predictions was, "In value terms, China's sportswear market is destined to grow from an estimated US\$7.2bn in 2009 to around US\$12.4bn in 2012."

We got answers where 'China' was omitted; where 2012 was omitted; where 'sportswear' was omitted; where a calculation was done so as to make a prediction that 'the market would grow by US\$5.2bn in the next 3 years'; and so on.

Candidates should know that when asked to 'identify' a conclusion, a reason, a prediction, etc., plagiarism is not an issue. Just copy it out.

#### Question 2

An implicit assumption question. These are always more difficult to get. Quite a lot of candidates sensed where the assumption lay but lost a mark by overstating it. For example, they'd say that **every street** in China was like the one in Fujian, instead of saying that the assumption was that Fujian was representative of the rest of China.

### **Question 3(a)**

Surprisingly, nearly everyone got this wrong. Most thought it was the last claim Naz made, when in fact it was the first. I think the main lesson here is that candidates need to realise that conclusions, though they logically come at the end of an argument, don't necessarily come at the end of its verbal delivery. Very often, people will start off with their conclusion, and then go on to defend it with reasons.

### **Question 3(b)**

Not many got full marks here. Getting one implicit assumption is hard enough for a lot of candidates, but getting two is very challenging. Centres should allocate more time to practising this aspect of critical thinking.

### **Question 4**

A good number of candidates identified the appeal to history flaw, but many didn't spot the hasty generalisation from 18<sup>th</sup> century to 'always', perhaps because it was a generalisation about time rather than numbers.

### **Question 5**

It was pleasing to see that many candidates noticed the possible contradiction at the heart of Naz's position, and in addition gave credit to Kerry for picking up on it. This question was done better than most of the others.

### **Question 6(a)**

Many candidates got one or other of the main flaws but few got both. The Straw Man was the most difficult to spot because you have to read what Naz said and compare it with what Kerry says in response in order to realise that she has distorted Naz's position. By contrast, the false dilemma was easier to see as its identification was confined to Kerry's speech.

### **Question 6(b)**

Most candidates missed the post hoc flaw in the support Naz gives for his point of view. Others merely reiterated what Naz said but didn't comment on how good or bad it was as evidence. Yet others commented vacuously about it being good or bad without going into specific reasons for these judgments. For example, they'd say things like, "I think Naz supports his viewpoint well as he has obviously looked into this and knows what he is talking about." This sort of answer got no marks.

### **Question 7**

Many found this question difficult to score highly on because they weren't sure how best to assess an analogy. In this case, you need to point out the differences between suit and tie **as a uniform** and sportswear as a **uniform** for youth. The more differences the less successful the analogy, and vice versa.

### Question 8

Nearly everyone got this wrong. It's not clear why, because it's a straightforward question. Perhaps they were looking to the end of the passage for the conclusion, or perhaps it was the length of the passage so they didn't spend time reading through it for the direction of the argument for the sake of just one mark. Anyway, it's another reminder that conclusions are as often to be found at the beginning of a text as at the end.

### Question 9

This question was generally well answered.

### Question 10

Over 90% of candidates fundamentally misunderstood what this question was asking them to do. They thought that 'give an **analysis** of the reasoning' meant evaluate, or assess, or critically appraise the strengths and / or weaknesses of the reasoning.

Centres will need to address this systemic failure of candidates to understand the nature of **analysis** of reasoning or argument.

It is clearly set out in the specification on page 10 section 3.1.4. Analysis is to do with simply identifying the parts and structure of an argument. It's essentially a **descriptive** task, without any element of evaluation. In fact, as the spec points out, it precedes evaluation. Question 11 asks candidates to evaluate the argument. So most candidates didn't get more than 1 or 2 marks out of 8 for Question 10, mainly because they correctly mentioned that architecture was being used as an example or an analogy in connection with fashion.

### Question 11

Many candidates struggled to get full marks for this question. Perhaps because the emotive language was relatively mild, eg the slightly disparaging 'some' and 'clutter up', the straw man at the end wasn't that easy either, and the hasty generalisation didn't use the normal cues such as 'every' and 'all', but simply used 'people' without an explicit quantifier prefixed to it.

### Question 12

Generally done quite well. Most candidates picked up a decent proportion of their overall marks on this question. As usual, little substantial use was made of the source documents, but conclusions were usually clearly stated and reasonably supported. A substantial minority didn't think to investigate, even at a cursory level, the possible ambiguities and vagueness of central terms such as 'individual' 'fashion' and 'follower', and hence their arguments depended on massive assumptions concerning what these words were supposed to mean.

I think there is room for centres to spend a bit more time helping students understand the importance of clarity in argument and on the usefulness of spending some time in preliminary matters such as definition and clarification of terms. This is an important part of critical thinking.

There were also some amusing examples of circular arguments. One of my favourites was the following opening remark,

“If you want to be an individual you cannot be a follower of fashion.’ I agree with this as you cannot be individual while following fashion.”

There’s no arguing with that!

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