

AS Level Thinking Skills (8436)

What is the AS in Thinking Skills?

AS Thinking Skills is designed as an academic one-year course for students in schools and colleges who are taking other AS and A level examinations. It has the same value as any other AS in terms of university entrance or acceptance by employees. It consists of two papers. In 2005 the format of Paper 1 will be multiple choice questions consisting of alternating sets of 5 Applied Arithmetic questions and 5 Assessing Argument questions. Paper 2 consists of structured answers and essays concerned with evaluating evidence and evaluating and presenting an argument.

Is the syllabus due for revision?

A new syllabus for 2006 has been published.

How many hours contact time do you recommend for AS?

4 hours per week of teaching time is adequate over one year. Obviously students will need to do individual work outside of this time. Students with good understanding of language and problem solving abilities may require less formal teaching.

What knowledge of mathematics is required by students?

High level mathematical skills are not required. The questions for Applied Arithmetic are all based on scenarios (as are the questions for all other parts of the examination) and the candidate is simply required to be able to extract and process data using addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. Knowledge of percentages, fractions and ratios is also necessary. The basis of the examination is to test the candidates understanding of what data to use and how to manipulate them to achieve the correct answer. In addition candidates will need to be able to understand information in the form of graphs, tables, scale drawings, etc.

Do candidates need to have English as a first language to be able to study Thinking Skills?

The level of language used is similar to that of other advanced level courses offered by CIE. Every effort is made to simplify language where possible, but care has to be taken by the question setters not to alter the meaning of the passages as this could invalidate the questions. Candidates will need to be able to understand fairly lengthy pieces of text (400 to 500 words) in some parts of the examination. Their understanding will need to be sufficiently good to identify understand the meaning, relevance, significance and function of the text as a whole or in part. In Assessing Argument, the language has to be precise. In this context an argument is 'a number of reasons put forward as grounds for a conclusion'. Therefore candidates must have sufficiently good understanding of English to be able to identify and draw conclusions, as well as being able to identify flaws and assumptions in arguments.

What support materials are available?

Syllabuses: 2004, 2005, 2006

Specimen Question Papers and Mark Schemes 2004 (one for 2006 will be available shortly)
Question Papers

All the above are available from CIE Publications

See also the question and answer below.

I can only afford one textbook for each student. What should I buy?

A new book called Thinking Skills is due to be published in 2005. This is written by John Butterworth and Geoff Thwaites. It is being published by CUP.

At the moment the most suitable text for Paper 2 of the AS level is Critical Thinking by Alec Fisher, published by CUP.