

## Award-winning Critical Thinking at Portsmouth College

OCR's revised A Level in Critical Thinking builds on eight years experience as it is the only awarding body to offer this fascinating and rewarding course. Portsmouth College offers a great success story, where the Critical Thinking course won *'The Good Schools Guide Award for best result at A Level in any English school'*.

Teacher Steve Fitzgerald believes the main reason his college won the award is the importance Critical Thinking has had on the syllabus. ***"We treat this course with the same regard as any other A Level," he explains. "We definitely don't see it as an easy option. It's a demanding course, which really stretches our students and helps improve their other subjects."***

A major difference between Critical Thinking and most other A Levels is its emphasis on developing skills rather than academic knowledge. ***"The course teaches essential life skills you can use in almost any situation,"*** continues Steve. ***"Students learn how to think, not what to think. We show them how to make decisions independently for themselves, and not simply take on the opinions of others."***

### Practice makes perfect

Specific subject matter is almost irrelevant in Steve's classes. ***"It's the way students analyse and evaluate arguments that counts – not what they're arguing about. With Critical Thinking, it's vital to practise. Like driving a car, you have to know you can do it in any circumstances, on any day."*** Steve regularly divides his students into three teams: one to argue for an issue, one to argue against it, and one to judge the outcome. Topics range from serious issues such as the death penalty and euthanasia to light-hearted questions such as, *"Is The Simpsons better than South Park?"*

So the key to teaching Critical Thinking is to develop intellectual powers through practical exercises as well as written work. OCR has designed the A Level to give teachers the flexibility to do this. ***"There's a definite structure to the course," says Steve, "but I've been able to create variety within it – and to encourage my students to contribute their own ideas, which makes the experience even more satisfying for them."***

### Looking ahead

As a relatively new A Level subject, Critical Thinking is still evolving – and Steve hopes his success will play a part in raising awareness of how this OCR course can build a range of abilities. ***"It's wonderful to see students' confidence grow so quickly, and of course I'm delighted by their terrific examination achievements. I really want to help build the subject's credibility – I genuinely believe all students should study Critical Thinking."***